THE PHANTOM

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

JIM SHEPHERD TALKS ABOUT THE GHOST WHO WALKS

ROY THOMAS GABS ABOUT THE GOLDEN AGE WITH **BILL SCHELLY**

THE INTERVIEW THAT WOULDN'T DIE! **DON McGREGOR**

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#146

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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL:
UP FRONT
a rap with *dak*

3

SPOTLIGHT: **THE GOLDEN AGE OF COMICS FANDOM**
remembering comicdom of the 1960s: *roy thomas* turns the tables on the author of the new book, *bill schelly*

6

THE PHANTOM

WRITER/EDITOR:
JIM SHEPHERD
"the ghost who walksabout" has a following around the world — but nowhere more so than australia, and *paul power* pulls no punches in this info-packed interview

18

WRITER:
DON McGREGOR
the penultimate . . . *penultimate,* we say (and this time we mean it) . . . part of the career-spanning interivew with the controversial comics scripter

43

UP FRONT

I've always loved The Phantom, as I believe all boys and more than a few men do everywhere.

Why?

The costume is cool. And it's purple.

The concept is captivating — a superhero who "lives forever" via the conferring of the cowl from one generation to another.

He's got a dog and a gun.

But best of all are the skull ring and, of course, Skull Island.

What more does any red-blooded, two-fisted guy really need to know?

The Phantom is a natural for the movies — and I, for one, hope the film folks get the snags sorted out soon and go into final production with the promised "major motion picture," because I can't wait to see it.

Meanwhile, we've got the comics, the strip, and the more than somewhat surprising TV animated series, set in the year 2040, no less. Not only a nifty idea, but proof positive that The Phantom is the kind of character that can keep up with the times and all the changes certain to shape the future, too.

One more question: Doesn't the guy sweat up a storm in the jungle and the desert wearing that full-body suit?

-Dak

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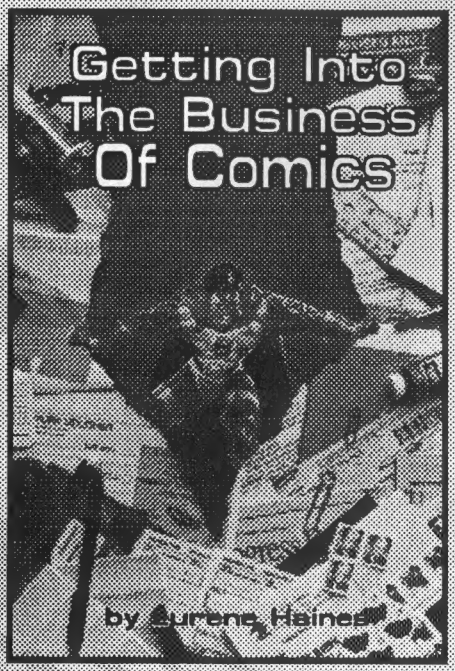

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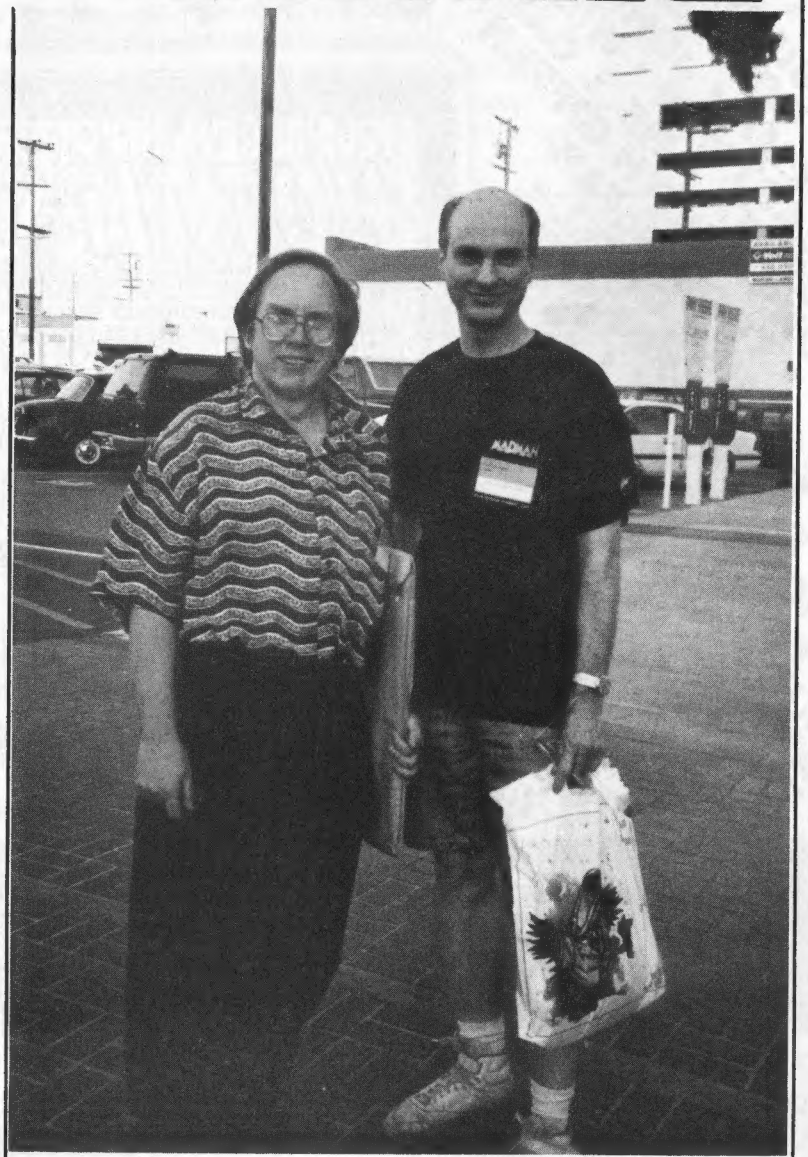
"There were about 2,000 comics fanzines in the 1960s."

GOLDEN COMIC



Roy Thomas and Bill Schelly at the 1994 San Diego ComiCon.
(Photo by Hurricane Heeran.)

"If anyone remembers me, it's for SENSE OF WONDER."

AGE OF FANDOM

Originally, this began as an interview with yours truly. Bill was finalizing his book on the history of Comic Fandom's first decade, and thought the readers of COMICS INTERVIEW would be interested in my memories of those halcyon days — since I had been editor-publisher of ALTER EGO, one of the better-known fanzines of the day. I told him that I'd already been interviewed at length in prior issues of CI (#66-#68), and doubted if the regular readers wanted to go over the same ground with me again.

It suddenly occurred to me that Bill would make a worthy interview subject in his own right. Having previewed his manuscript, and been tapped to do an introduction for that selfsame book, I found him to be a knowledgeable, conscientious researcher who seemed to have an obsession with those early, developmental days of comicdom. Though taken slightly aback by my offer to interview him, on the genesis of his book and other related subjects, Schelly agreed — but only if I agreed to jump in here and there with my own thoughts. With that, we were off and running . . .

ROY THOMAS: *How did you decide to write a book on the history of comic fandom?*

BILL SCHELLY: Because I'm fascinated with how this whole phenomenon got started. It actually hit me as I was just drifting around the floor of the Exhibition Hall at the San Diego Comicon several years ago. The convention has gotten so huge, and there were throngs of people swarming around, and hi-tech displays and such. It suddenly hit me how far comic fandom has come, from its modest origins.

ROY: *The origin of comics fandom isn't exactly common knowledge.*

BILL: Exactly. If someone was curious

Dick Lupoff's XERO, a science-fiction fanzine that ran occasional articles about comic books. Cover art from #3, January 1961.

Justice League, Batman, Captain & Mary Marvel ©1995 DC Comics, Inc.

"There *were* comics fanzines before ALTER EGO."

how it got started, where would they go? Every year, **Overstreet's** COMIC BOOK PRICE GUIDE runs the same short summary, about a page, but that's all. Someone once said, writers write the books they would like to read. That's basically what happened. I got a little curious, and started interviewing old time fans, and the more I learned the hungrier I got for more information. Before I knew it, I was writing a book.

One of the first things I did was package up some of my interviews for a column in COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE called "Fandom's Founders," but it always seemed to be squeezed out. This was in 1992. **Don** and **Maggie Thompson** were enthusiastic about the series, but it only appeared three times. **Jeff Gelb** and I interviewed **Jerry Bails, Biljo White, Ronn Foss, Grass Green, Raymond Miller, Howard Keltner** and others. That was the beginning of my research.

ROY: *When did you first get involved with comics fandom?*

BILL: Around July 1964, I bought JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #30, which was the second part of the "Crisis on Earth Three" story. In the letters column, **Julius Schwartz** plugged **G.B. Love's** ROCKET'S BLAST-COMICOLLECTOR, which was the premiere adzine of the 1960s. When I received my first copy, I couldn't believe my eyes! Here was a magazine full of ads for old comics, asking what I thought were astronomical prices. You know, like $3.00 for CAPTAIN AMERICA #8, really out of sight. *(Laughter.)* I was hooked.

ROY: *Everyone thought those prices were just outrageous.*

BILL: Yes, yes. I remember showing them to my dad, and he just shook his head. He couldn't believe anyone would ask as much as $5.00 for a comic book. And he was a stamp collector. He should have understood. Even comics fans were just *beginning* to understand that these comics were rare, and worth money. They were Americana. The search for back issues of old comics was one of the main energizing factors that got comic fandom started.

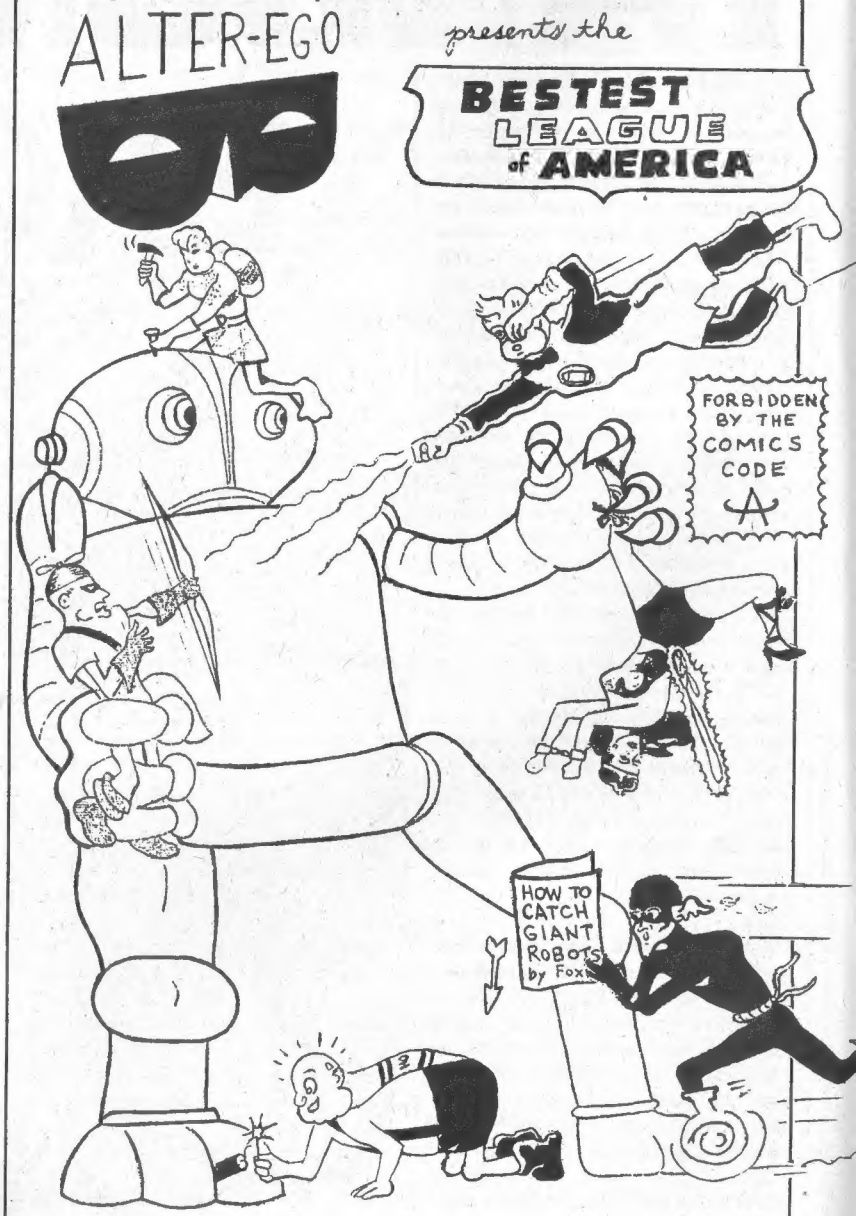
ROY: *In one of our letters, you mentioned publishing your own fanzines back then. When did that get started?*

BILL: About two weeks after I saw my first fanzine, I got bitten by the publishing bug. My best friend's father worked in an office with a Xerox machine, so we enlisted him to be our printer. In February 1965 the first issue of SUPER HEROES ANONYMOUS rolled off the presses. It was pretty bad, but what do you expect from a couple of twelve-year-olds? It was so much fun, plotting how we were going to take fandom by storm. I'll never forget my excitement when I saw our first full page ad in RB-CC. SUPER HEROES ANONYMOUS was a crud-zine, pure and simple . . . but there we were, right next to ads for great fanzines like STAR-STUDDED COMICS, and MASQUERADER and ALTER-EGO.

Later on, after I grew up a little, I published SENSE OF WONDER, which ran twelve issues, until 1972. If anyone remembers me, it's probably because of SENSE OF WONDER. My claim to fame is that I published the first really extensive articles on **Will Eisner** in 1971. But I was never a Big Name Fan like you. I looked up to people like **Jerry Bails,** and **Ronn Foss,** and **Don Thompson.** I feel really fortunate to have been around to read all the classic fanzines as they were originally published, and be a part of it all — if only a small part.

ROY: *Why did you call your book THE GOLDEN AGE OF COMIC FANDOM?*

BILL: I draw a parallel between what comics' Golden Age gave to the field, and the legacy that was created for comic fandom in its infancy.



A-E #1, cover by none other than Roy Thomas, from March, 1961.

"But superhero comics fandom didn't really get started before ALTER EGO."

ROY: *By infancy, what years are we talking about?*

BILL: From roughly 1961 to 1972. That's the period I call comicdom's Golden Age. It was a time when all the foundations . . . the institutions, you might say . . . were established. Fanzines devoted exclusively to costumed heroes, comicons, the amateur comic strips, and of course price guides.

ROY: *You cited 1961 as its beginning, which stands out in my mind because that was the year that Jerry put out ALTER-EGO #1, with a little help from me.*

BILL: Without a doubt, the publication of ALTER-EGO #1 in March of 1961 is an important benchmark in the history of comicdom. It was the first fanzine to catch the wave of interest in DC's Silver Age revivals, and it came along just at the right time to unify both old time comic fans and younger baby boomers who were discovering THE FLASH and JLA and other exciting comics coming out of **Schwartz'** stable.

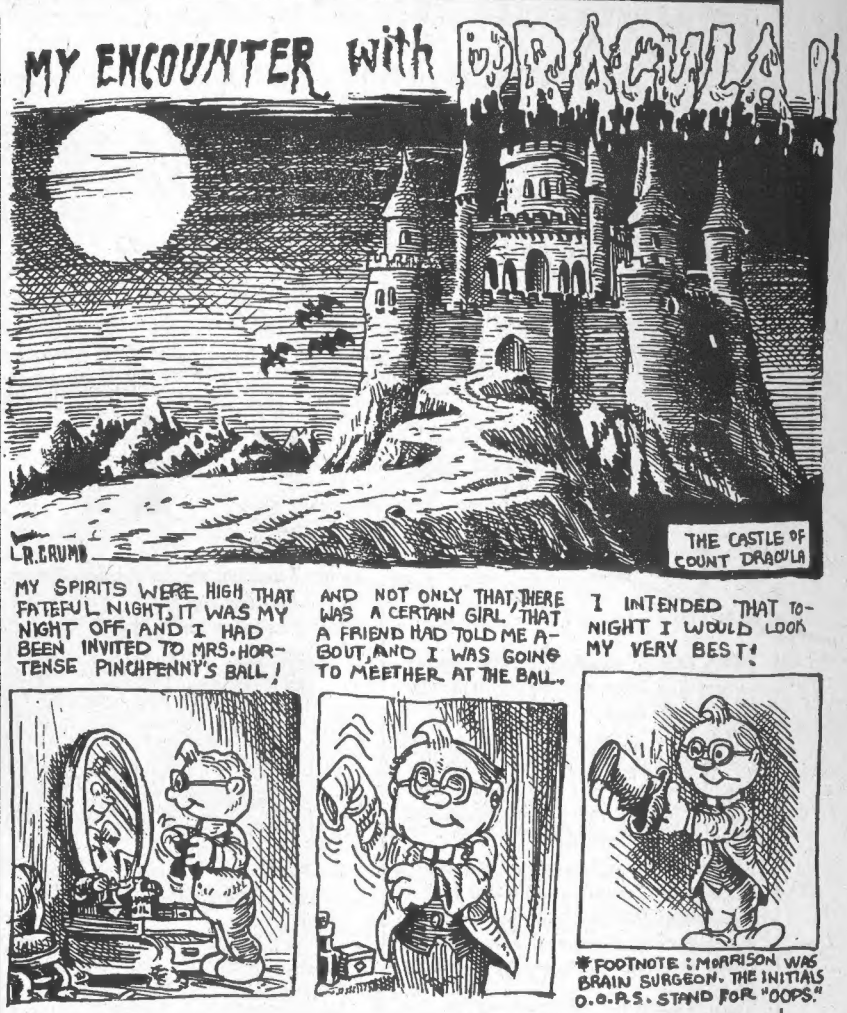
ROY: *What about comics fanzines before ALTER-EGO?*

BILL: Labeling something a benchmark, or a first, is a tricky business. It's like when people start tracing the history of comic art, or sequential art. It goes back to the cave paintings at Lascaux, France! And if you say that, there's going to be someone who'll say, "But what about the *earlier* cave paintings?" There *were* comic fanzines before ALTER-EGO, certainly. **Jerry Siegel** and **Joe Shuster** were putting together a little zine reproduced with carbon paper called COSMIC STORIES around 1930. And there were others, like **Malcolm Willits'** COMIC COLLECTOR'S NEWS in the late 1940s, and **Ted White's** FACTS ABOUT SUPERMAN in 1952. But, I wanted to write about the history of comic *fandom*, specifically super-hero comics fandom, and in my opinion it didn't really get started until you and **Jerry Bails** put out ALTER-EGO.

ROY: *As I recall, Jerry hadn't been exposed to fanzines until Julie Schwartz showed him Dick Lupoff's XERO, a science fiction fanzine that ran occasional articles about comic books.*

BILL: The "All In Color For A Dime" feature in XERO made a big impact, but in examining the correspondence that Jerry provided, and doing a lot of other checking and cross-checking, I concluded that Jerry hadn't even heard the word fanzine until he visited **Schwartz** early in 1961.

ROY: *I know I hadn't, until I think Jerry loaned me some of the XEROs by way of Julie.*


MY ENCOUNTER with DRACULA
R. CRUMB
THE CASTLE OF COUNT DRACULA
MY SPIRITS WERE HIGH THAT FATEFUL NIGHT, IT WAS MY NIGHT OFF, AND I HAD BEEN INVITED TO MRS. HORTENSE PINCHPENNY'S BALL!
AND NOT ONLY THAT, THERE WAS A CERTAIN GIRL THAT A FRIEND HAD TOLD ME ABOUT, AND I WAS GOING TO MEETHER AT THE BALL.
I INTENDED THAT TONIGHT I WOULD LOOK MY VERY BEST!
*FOOTNOTE: MORRISON WAS BRAIN SURGEON. THE INITIALS O.O.P.S. STAND FOR "OOPS."

Early R. Crumb fanzine art. From FOO #2 (1958).

BILL: Like I was saying, the point isn't whether there were fanzines, or comic fanzines before ALTER-EGO. It's clearly demonstrable that A-E was the rallying point that brought comic book fans out of the woodwork to form the nucleus of a fandom just for comic fans. Jerry was a dynamo of energy in those days, and he can't be given enough credit for getting the ball rolling. ALTER-EGO led directly to THE COMICOLLECTOR and THE COMIC READER, the first ad-zine and news-zine specifically for fans of comic art.

ROY: *Of course, there was EC fandom in the middle 1950s.*

BILL: Yes, and I have to thank **John Benson,** who published the legendary EC fanzine, SQUA TRONT, for teaching me a lot about EC fandom. I used to think that after the EC comics died, after the Comics Code Authority was established, that EC fandom totally died away. Most of the major fanzines like THE EC FAN BULLETIN, FANTASY-COMICS and HOO-HAH! were at least started before **Bill Gaines'** comics died. What I didn't know, till John clued me in, was that any number of similar fanzines were published from 1957 to 1961 in what was really a continuation of EC fandom. **Robert** and **Charles Crumb** published three issues of FOO, which was a photo-offset collection of their strips and cartoons, in 1958.

ROY: *I'll bet those are collector's items.*

BILL: They're incredibly rare. I included some reproductions from FOO in my book, though I wish I'd had room to run more.

"I did it because I wanted to read it."

ROY: *Lots of examples of the fanzine covers and other art are an important part of your book.*

BILL: They're essential, because those fanzines are so hard to find. I crammed as much artwork in as I could, and a lot of photographs too. Being comic fans, we're all so visually oriented.

ROY: *How many fanzines do you own?*

BILL: Not as many as you might think. I have about 800 fanzines, but at least a hundred of them are actually photocopies.

ROY: *How did you get your hands on that many?*

BILL: I'd saved a few from my own period of activity in comicdom, which started in 1964. But I stupidly sold most of my original collection in the early 1970s. When I started working on this book, I got in touch with **Ronn Foss,** one of the Big Name Fans of the 1960s, and Ronn was kind of enough to loan me some of those great oldies.

ROY: *Where is Ronn these days?*

BILL: He's living in the Missouri Ozarks. He's got a cabin there, and owns about twenty acres. You know, he was sort of a country boy, though he cultivated that image of "What Kind of Man Reads PLAYBOY" with the pipe and all. When he heard from me, he wrote me this incredible 32-page letter. It just went on and on. That letter was a tremendous inspiration.

When I began researching fan history in earnest, I started the Comic Fandom Archive, and have been receiving donations of fanzines and other material from lots of old-time fans.

ROY: ***They give you the stuff?***

BILL: Yes. Not all of them, but some of them are getting older, and want to make sure their fanzines, and other memorabilia from that era, don't get thrown out by relatives who don't value the stuff. And I've got the Archive set up so that the material will all, eventually go to the

At the 1964 Alley Award Tally Party, Ronn Foss surprised everyone by his sudden appearance as Rocketman.

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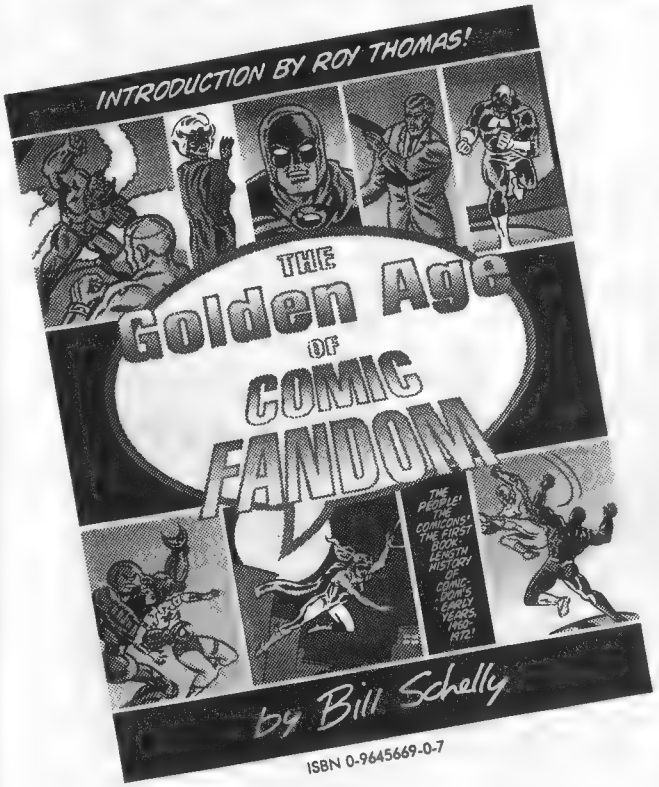

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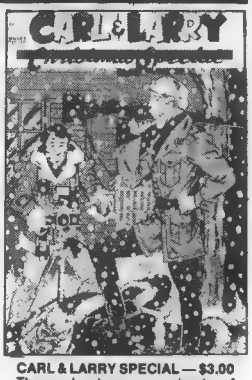

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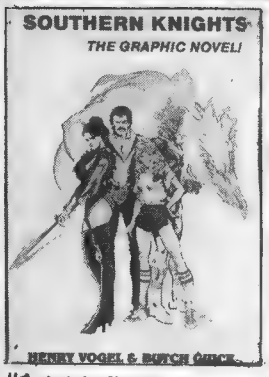

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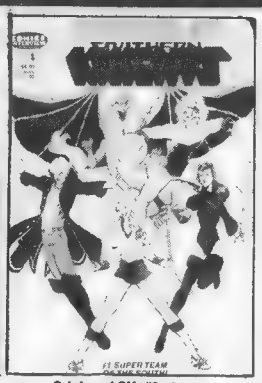

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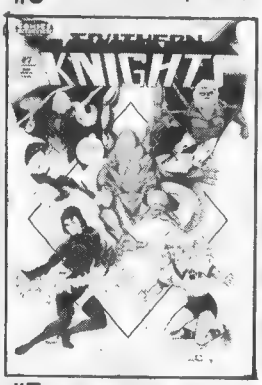

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"A lot of fans worked hard to make comics fandom into something."

Michigan State University special collection of comic art. It got started when **Foss** donated a stack of fanzines to the cause. Then **Jerry Bails** saw some of my recent publications, and sent me his *entire* fanzine collection, some on loan and some as donations to the Archive. Plus, I've picked up a lot of fanzines at comicons or through the mail. There were about 2,000 comics fanzines published in the 1960s.

ROY: *How did you arrive at that figure?*

BILL: **John** and **Tom McGeehan** bought multiples of just about every fanzine back then. They called themselves the "House of Info," and used to published all kinds of checklists and such. At the end of the decade when they counted them up, there were something like 2,700 different issues. Based on their description, and my correspondence with Tom recently, I figure about 700 of those were about other fields like **Edgar Rice Burroughs,** or movie serials, or science fiction. I've been fortunate to accumulate complete runs of ALTER EGO, COMIC ART, XERO, STAR-STUDDED COMICS, THE COMICOLLECTOR, FANTASY ILLUSTRATED and just about all the ROCKET'S BLAST-COMICOLLECTOR (RB-CC) issues. So I had plenty of material to research the history of comic fandom.

ROY: *What's been your biggest challenge?*

BILL: Besides coordinating all the information? I guess the hardest part has been tracking down all the old-time fans, and getting them to trust me enough to allow me to interview them.

ROY: *Did you do a lot of interviews for THE GOLDEN AGE OF COMIC FANDOM?*

BILL: Lots. Around a hundred. Folks like **G.B. Love, Buddy Saunders, Bill Spicer, Gary Groth.** At first it was kind of intimidating.

ROY: *Why?*

BILL: *(Laughter.)* Well . . . for one thing, I'm kind of in awe of fans like **Bill Thailing, Sam Moskowitz, Malcolm Willits** and so on. Plus, if you're going to interview those folks, you better know your material. It's insulting to them if you haven't done your research. So it took a lot of preparation. I remember, just before I spent a couple of hours talking to **Dick** and **Pat Lupoff,** I was pretty nervous. I didn't know that much at the time about sf fandom, so I was worried I'd make a fool out of myself, but they couldn't have been nicer and . . . what's the word? Disarming? I learned so many things about sf fandom and the period leading up to ALTER-EGO. And, I have *you* to thank for loaning me your complete bound set of XERO.

From XERO #1 (Sept. 1960).

ROY: *That was a gift from Dick. Those are some of my most prized fanzines. I think the "All In Color For A Dime" articles by the likes of Lupoff, Ted White, Jim Harmon, and Don Thompson had a tremendous influence on my fan writing after that. That brings up a likely question, Bill. What was* your *favorite fanzine from the 1960s?*

BILL: Hmm. That's a tough one. Narrowing it down to just one is impossible. There's a number of them, for different reasons. I really dug STAR-STUDDED COMICS, especially for the Human Cat strips by **Grass Green,** which were amazing. BATMANIA, because of that great mimeo printing and articles on the Caped Crusader, who has always been my favorite costumed character. The one that impressed me the most was always **Bill Spicer's** FANTASY ILLUSTRATED, and later GRAPHIC STORY MAGAZINE. He had so many fantastic artists doing strips for him, especially a guy named **Landon Chesney.** Do you remember him?

ROY: *Sure. His stuff always had an EC-type flavor.*

BILL: One strip in particular. "The Life Battery," which **Spicer** adapted from a story by **Otto Binder.** (FANTASY ILLUSTRATED #2, June 1964.) When I first saw the opening page, with that incredible detail, my jaw fell open. I've been a **Chesney** fan every since. I still have to shake myself to realize that **Spicer** sent me **Chesney's** roughs and preparatory sketches for "The Life Battery" for the Archive. I just got chills up and down my spine as I looked through them. His "Misbourne and the Master" strips in FI #5 and 6 are great, too. **Chesney** helped a lot with my book, and I now consider him a friend.

ROY: *Any other favorite fanzines?*

BILL: I hope you don't mind if I include ALTER EGO in my pantheon . . .

ROY: (Laughter.) *Mind? I don't think so . . .*

BILL: It's true, and not just your issues. Jerry put out a good fanzine, but I always thought that **Ronn Foss** raised it to another level when he took over with AE #5. For one thing, his Eclipse origin strip will always rank as a true fan classic. In retrospect, I'm glad that Julie nixed his and **Dru Moroz'** desire to update Dr.

"In 1965 you could get a nice copy of

The 1964 Alley Tally Party at Jerry Bails' house in a Detroit suburb, March 22, 1964. Left to right: Don Glut, Bub Butts, Larry Raybourne, Dick Andersen, Alex Almaraz, Jerry Bails, Jim Rossow (looking at Alex), Keith Greene (holding ALTER-EGO #6). Kneeling: Ron Foss and Mike Tuohey. (Photo by Chuck Moss.)

Mid-Nite, forcing them to come up with their own variation. Ronn was always so great with character names. A lot of them are so catchy they've become car-names! Eclipse . . . Viper . . . Excel.

Good as Jerry's and Ronn's issues were, your ALTER EGO #7 through 9 are, to my mind, the quintessential photo-offset fanzines. Your "One Man's Family" article on the Marvel Family in #7 was responsible for turning me on to those great old Fawcett comics. **C.C. Beck** became one of my all-time favorite artists. I collected Fawcett comics for quite a while, and still have a few special issues.

One thing about your issues of ALTER EGO that really helped was having **Biljo White** on board as Art Editor.

ROY: *I couldn't agree more. You know, I had to kind of push Biljo to do some of that art, because he had so many other irons in the fire. Especially for ALTER EGO #9, my last issue.*

BILL: Biljo did so much artwork, he was probably feeling overworked at the time.

ROY: *I used to give him specific assignments, like "We need a big picture of Blackhawk and three smaller spot illustrations," and I think maybe it just got to be work for him, instead of fun.*

BILL: Plus, 1965 was when BATMANIA took off, and he had his hands full with that. It was printed by mimeograph, which he had to print and collate by hand. That's one things fans might not realize, but all those ditto and mimeo fanzines had to be hand-assembled. When you have a circulation of 500 or 600 copies like BATMANIA, it was back-breaking! I don't know if anyone would be willing to go through all that, today.

ROY: *I assembled ALTER EGO #8 by hand. And hand-stapled it, too.*

BILL: You're kidding! There were, what, 1000 copies printed?

ROY: *1000, maybe 1500.*

BILL: Were you nuts? Why didn't you have the printer do it?

ROY: (Laughter.) *Probably I wanted to save money. I can't remember now.*

BILL: A lot of fans worked hard to make comic fandom into something. My theory is that the older fans had waited for a long time for something like comicdom, and were so grateful that it even existed, that they would do just about anything to keep it going strong.

ROY: *How did comicons get started?*

BILL: At first, comic fans would get together at the sf World Cons, like the one in Pittsburgh in 1960 or Chicago in 1962. They made their presence known in the costume competitions. **Dick** and **Pat Lupoff** made quite a sensation with their appearance as Captain and Mary Marvel in 1960. A bunch of sf fans came as the Justice Society of America to the ChiCon in 1962. In the Huckster Room, as sf fans called it . . . one could find a certain amount of old comics, especially ECs and Avons, among the sf and pulp magazines that were for sale.

The first regional meeting exclusively for comic book fans took place at **Jerry Bails'** home in Detroit. That was in March of 1964. He invited fans to help him tally the 1963 Alley Award ballots. Your idea of having fandom give awards each year to pro comics they especially liked really caught on.

ROY: *It started when I was writing an article for ALTER EGO on my top ten comics. It just occurred to me that it would be better to get all fans' views, rather than just my own. Of course, there were also categories for amateurs, like "Favorite Fanzine," that sort of thing.*

BILL: The Alley Awards grew . . . from ten categories in 1961 to dozens by 1964. Jerry had something like 250 ballots, and he wanted help in toting them up. Nineteen fans spent the weekend at Jerry's house. **Don** and **Maggie Thompson** drove up from Cleveland, **Don Glut** from Chicago, **Chuck Moss** from Nebraska, and others like Ronn Foss and Grass Green came from neighboring states.

One thing struck me, as I was researching the Alley Tally Party, was how this meeting in early 1964 had a lot of elements of a comicon. Trading and selling . . . a display of original art . . . overnight accommodations . . . even a masquerade. **Ronn Foss** made a cool surprise appearance in a Rocketman costume that he'd made.

That same spring in 1964, Detroit fans **Dave Szurek** and **Bob Brosch** organized

SUPERMAN #1 for fifty or sixty dollars."

a gathering of about seventy fans at a local hotel. But the 1964 New York Comicon put on by **Bernie Bubnis** has traditionally been recognized as the first real comicon.

ROY: *Because it was in New York . . .?*

BILL: Probably because of the pros that attended. There were three people from Marvel there, including **Steve Ditko.** And **Tom Gill,** the Lone Ranger artist for Gold Key, gave a talk. Also, a lot of well known dealers came to the New York meet, like **Claude Held, Malcolm Willits, Don Foote, Phil Seuling** and **Howard Rogofsky.** Some didn't bring any comics, though. They weren't sure if it would be worth it! **Rogofsky** only brought his price list.

ROY: *Rogofsky's prices, if I recall, were always the highest.*

BILL: The funny thing about his lists was his refusal to grade comics specifically. The list just had a comment at the beginning, saying that all comics were in very good to mint condition.

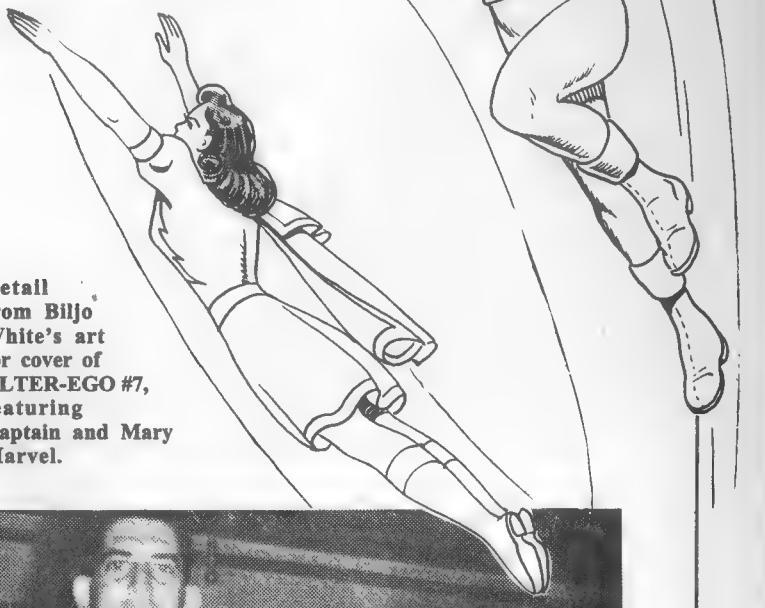
ROY: *Getting back to the comicons, I know my old friend Dave Kaler followed up in New York with cons over the next several years.*

BILL: Yes, yes. **Kaler** got a lot of pros in attend in 1965, and also ran the cons in 1966 and 1967. It wasn't until 1968 that **Phil Seuling** took over, with **Kaler's** blessing. In 1968, there were over 700 fans, which was just a staggering number at the time. In 1968 and 1969, comicons really took off, not just in New York but across the country. Then **Shel Dorf,** who had been behind the Detroit Triple Fan Fairs starting in 1965, organized a con in San Diego in 1970. He told me he was bored and just wanted something to do. And today the San Diego con is, well . . . mammoth!

ROY: *When did it become apparent that comics fandom wouldn't peter out?*

BILL: I'd say in 1965, when **Kaler** was able to convince a lot of pros to attend the New York comicon. This was an incredibly important development. 1965 really was the year it all came together. This was symbolized when **Bill Spicer** (now a letterer on CONCRETE) published THE GUIDEBOOK TO COMICS FANDOM under the auspices of **Bails** and the Academy of Comic Book Fans and Collectors. A lot of the prefatory material in the GUIDEBOOK was picked up by **Bob Overstreet** for the COMIC BOOK PRICE GUIDE in 1970. The original GUIDEBOOK had a grading guide, a list of important comics from the 1940s, and ads from prominent fanzines and dealers. It was designed to introduce fandom to newcomers. To explain how it worked . . . what comic book collectors did, so to speak. The assumption was that pro comics would plug the GUIDEBOOK and this would enlarge fandom. That part didn't happen. I think **Julie Schwartz** and other editors probably felt it was apparent that fandom was thriving, and didn't need a lot of plugs. Most of the fanzine plugs in pro comics, like in JLA #30, were in 1963 and 1964.

ROY: *I recall 1965 as a year when fandom got quite a bit of publicity, in NEWSWEEK for instance.*



Detail from Biljo White's art for cover of ALTER-EGO #7, featuring Captain and Mary Marvel.

The Lupoffs at the 1960 PittCon. "Dick and Pat made quite a sensation as Captain and Mary Marvel."

"Before 1965, there was an invisible barrier

Biljo White, Jerry Bails, Sandra Bails, Linda Rahm and Roy Thomas, at Biljo's house in Columbia, Missouri. "Three of fandom's founders finally meet!"

BILL: In 1965 and 1966, the media discovered comic fandom. There were literally hundreds of articles in newspapers around the country and even overseas about this so-called cult of comic book collectors. Usually, the focus of the articles was about how much money those old funny books were worth. The idea that a comic book could be worth, you know . . . a hundred bucks, it just blew people's minds! It's hard to imagine, but in 1965 you could get a nice copy of SUPERMAN #1 for fifty or sixty dollars.

Shel Dorf and **Jerry Bails** were interviewed a lot for these articles, and they tried to get the point across that comic strips and books were more than commodities, that they were an art form worth of serious study. The fact that Jerry had a Ph.D. and was an assistant professor of natural science at Wayne State University in Michigan always made good copy. That NEWSWEEK article, "Batfans and Supermaniacs" on February 15, 1965, brought national attention to fandom.

ROY: *1965 was also the year that superhero comics were proliferating like mad.*

BILL: Right. You'd go to the newsstand and see new titles almost every week. It seemed like everyone was jumping on the super hero bandwagon, from Harvey to Archie Publications. **Jim Warren's** CREEPY made the scene that year, and so did Tower Comics with T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS.

ROY: *I remember seeing Wally Wood's original artwork for Tower on his drawing board in July of 1965, months before it appeared.*

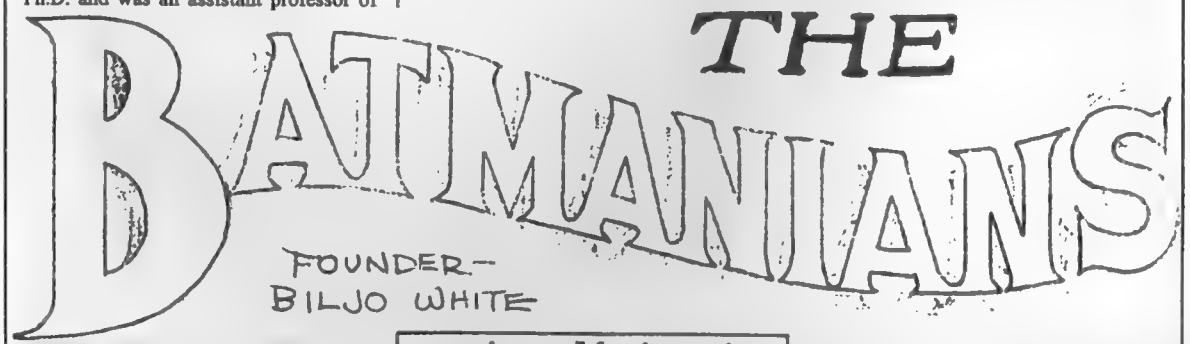
BILL: T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS #1 came out at the end of '65. With the superhero boom, pro comics were beginning to look for new talent, and were aware of fandom as a potential source.

ROY: *Yeah. 1965 marked a real turning point for me. I worked for Charlton, DC and Marvel all in the space of one year, albeit briefly for the first two.*

BILL: You lasted at DC about a week.

ROY: *Right. I didn't care much for Mort Weisinger's methods. Then I got a call from Stan Lee. But I don't want to scoop your book. The whole story's in there.*

BILL: Before 1965, it was almost like there was an invisible barrier between fandom and the pro arena. Lots of fans, like **Ronn Foss**, submitted samples to the pro companies but didn't get any nibbles.



between fandom and the pro arena."

Julie and Stan didn't seem interested. But when *you* broke in, there was kind of a gradual thaw. After that, a few more fans started to break into the pro ranks.

ROY: *Dave Kaler and Tom Fagan sold to Charlton right after me. Dan Adkins, who was a long-time sf fan, began doing lots of art for Marvel shortly thereafter. He'd already been working for Wally on* T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS, *of course.*

BILL: Not to mention people like **Jim Starlin, Berni Wrightson, Rich Buckler** and others by the beginning of the 1970s. Comics fandom served as a training ground for the pros who would become major forces in the comics industry in the 1970s. Let's not forget that one of the most important comic book events of the 1970s was your CONAN THE BARBARIAN comic book, with art by **Barry Windsor-Smith.** Then there was **Mike Kaluta** on THE SHADOW . . . and, the list goes on and on.

That's one of the main reasons I wanted to write this book. If you know how to look, if you have the proper background, you can see the fingerprints of old-time fans all over the shape of comic fandom today. The pros, the comicons, even the direct market itself. **Phil Seuling,** its chief architect, was a very active fan in the 1960s. People should know these things. At least in my view, our shared history is important. It's where our hobby world came from. It shouldn't be lost.

ROY: *You cite 1972 as the end of comicdom's Golden Age. Why 1972?*

BILL: That's the year that STAR-STUDDED COMICS, one of the major showcases of amateur comic strips of the 1960s, threw in the towel. Their premiere character, Dr. Weird, had been drawn mainly by **Jim Starlin** in 1970 and 1971, and **Starlin** how moved on. So many fans were getting pro assignments that the publishers of SSC were having trouble getting good quality strips. It was the end of an era.

By 1972, **Overstreet's** PRICE GUIDE made it possible for more and more investors to move into comic book collecting. A lot of the old-time fans had dropped out. That was the year I published my last issue of SENSE OF WONDER, while in my senior year at college. Fandom was changing. Comicons were getting more and more professional.

I wouldn't want anyone to think I'm putting down comics fandom after 1972. That would be like putting down all comics after their Golden Age. I'm sure a lot of fans feel about the 1970s the same way I feel about the 1960s. But for the purposes of this book, I chose to concentrate on the earlier, formative years.

ROY: *What kind of interest do you think THE GOLDEN AGE OF COMIC FANDOM will generate?*

BILL: I really don't know. When I talk to some people, they're enthusiastic and think it has a lot of sales potential, and others just kind of get quiet . . . and talk about what a small, specialized audience it will have.

I don't have any illusions about it having huge sales. But my gut feeling is that it's a subject, if presented properly, that would interest any serious comics fan. I wrote the book mainly as a labor of love. I did it because I wanted to read it. I didn't realize it would almost kill me in the process. *(Laughter.)*

ROY: *I can only imagine how hard it was to do all that research. Those old fanzines are hard to find, and then to bring it all together so that it makes sense. I think you did a wonderful job of blending all the facts and anecdotes together. It's an entertaining read.*

BILL: Thanks. I tried to make it as readable as possible. I didn't want it to get bogged down in long lists of obscure names and dates.

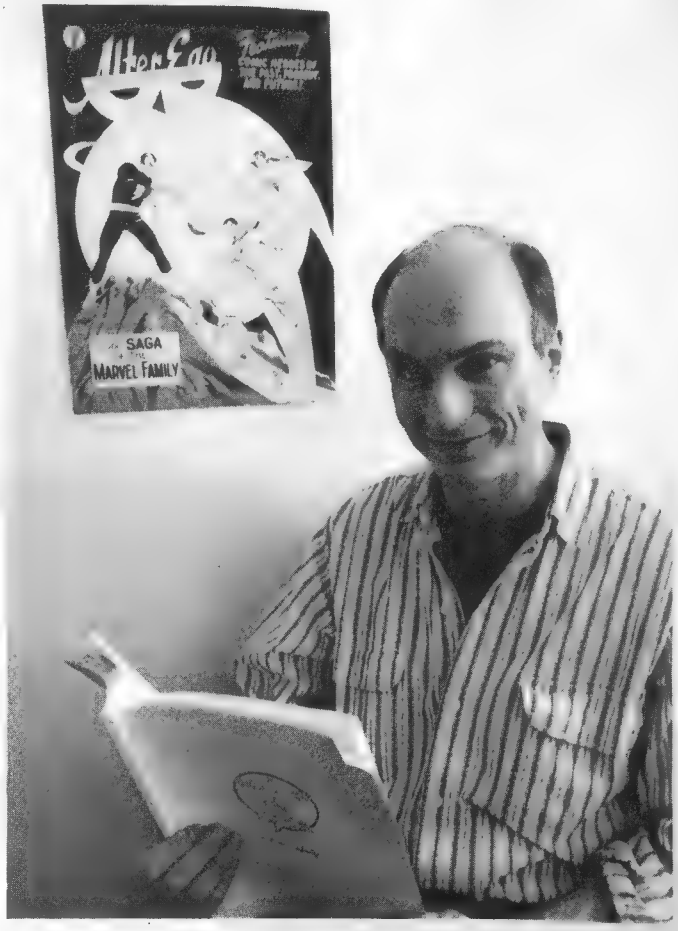
ROY: *Are you satisfied with the way it turned out?*

BILL: Overall, yes. I would have liked to have it published in a hardback edition, but that would have forced the price way up. The square-bound trade paperback with four-color covers is certainly sufficient.

As far as the contents, I'm very pleased with it. Although with creative endeavors, as you well know, there's always compromise.

ROY: *You couldn't put everything in.*

BILL: Despite the fact that I mention a lot of fans, I imagine some are going to be disappointed when they look through the index. All I can say is, this is my version of the story. The text is about 75,000 words long, yet you could say it only scratches the surface. But that's the exciting part. It's a big story.



Golden Age of Comic Fandom author Bill Schelly posing in front of the original art to the classic fanzine, ALTER-EGO #7 (1964), edited and published by Roy Thomas.

"The most *important* news program on television

JIM SHEPHERD

Comics' longest-running series about a costumed hero (still written, amazingly enough, by its creator) is virtually ignored in the country of its birth, although maybe the strangely stylized PHANTOM 2040 animated series on TV and the forthcoming PHANTOM major movie will change that in days to come. THE PHANTOM still appears in a healthy number of newspapers, but the only regular source for a collected version is COMICS REVUE magazine — which is only sold at full-service *comics shops or by subscription. It's different in Australia, where large chunks of PHANTOM continuity appear on a regular basis. Here, Paul Power and Tad Pietrzykowski chat with the man behind Frew Publications' THE PHANTOM . . .*

Above: Belt buckle artwork. Next pg.: One of Jim's early efforts on the Phantom series.

PAUL POWER: *Jim, when did your association with THE PHANTOM begin?*

JIM SHEPHERD: Officially, 1988, January. I'd been *sort* of involved up to that point from '87. One of the guys running Frew Publication unfortunately died in 1987; that was **Walter Richardson.** His other partner, **Ron Forsythe,** frankly admitted they had been getting a little bit too old for it; they had lost a little bit of *touch* with the comic-book business and everything else. So, they dragged me in to see what I could do with THE PHANTOM.

If you cast your mind back to 1988, THE PHANTOM was a soft-cover job and they followed without *flinching* this policy of just regurgitating old issues; an issue would come out and it would be automatically reprinted three years later. I didn't believe that was getting anywhere, so I decided when I took the

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Jim Shepherd
Born: Sydney, Australia — 1933
Residence: Mossman, Sydney
Working Life: Sportswriter, various Sydney newspapers. Later, sports director and sportscaster, Channel Ten and Radio 2UE, Sydney. Later again, author 14 books on Australian sport and, over the years, contributor to 100-plus magazines — articles ranging from sport to Australian history, international travel, motoring and antiques.
Favorite Comics: THE PHANTOM, MANDRAKE THE MAGICIAN, anything **Roy Crane,** vintage BUCK ROGERS, DICK TRACY, LI'L ABNER, and about 300 others.
Hobbies: Auto racing (driving), book collecting, all sports watching, golf (playing), sketching (badly), photography.
Comics Writing Credits: Two PHANTOM stories published in Australia: "Rumble in the Jungle" and "Return of the Singh Brotherhood."
Favorite Cities: New York, London, New Orleans, Hong Kong, Rome, Sydney.
Biggest Career Mistake: Trying to become Australia's **George Plimpton** on my own TV sports show! Auto racing was successful; completely out of my depth against a former world-rated Australian middleweight; terrified riding sidecar passenter in speedway race; became over-involved in sky diving; stricken with claustrophobia scuba diving and battered to a near pulp in a top-grade Rugby League football match.

The Phantom ©1995 King Features Syndicate / Wonder Woman, Batman, Superman ©1995 DC Comics / Wolverine ©1995 Marvel Entertainment Group Inc. / The Phantom 2040 ©1995 King Features Syndicate; art ©1995 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

was the 1000th edition of THE PHANTOM."

THE PHANTOM
Created by LEE FALK
"RETURN of the SINGH Brotherhood"
FOR THOSE WHO CAME IN LATE...
400 YEARS AGO THE SOLE SURVIVOR OF A PIRATE ATTACK, SWORE ON THE SKULL OF HIS FATHER'S KILLER TO AVENGE HIS DEATH AND BRING TO JUSTICE THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR PIRACY AND ACTS OF INJUSTICE. THIS ACT PRESENTED TO HIS DESCENDANTS, A LEGACY THAT PROMOTED THE LEGEND OF THE PHANTOM, THE GHOST WHO WALKS...!
WRITTEN by JIM SHEPHERD
ILLUSTRATED by KEITH CHATTO

company over in early '88 that what we should do was get with it and move into the current century. Hence, the move towards our current mix of old titles — but in their *entirety,* no editing, no censorship — and probably 90% of the issues now have an art cover. And I've covered myself in tons of *dust* going through the King Features archives looking for stuff that I *know* is there but is *very* difficult to find.

PAUL: *Right. See, what I like is, I've known other people in the States, like Bill Blackbeard, that if you want to find* any *of these old strips you* do *have to do your own detective work, because the files aren't in great order anymore.*

JIM: Yeah, that's quite true. Well, you see, *what* the guys running Frew Publications when I first became involved didn't *quite* understand was what sort of a market they had. They didn't really know who was buying the comics. *(Laughter.)* I said that was the first thing we should find out.

PAUL: *Yeah.*

JIM: What we have found out about THE PHANTOM is that — as *close* as you can possibly get to the truth — I believe the bulk of our audience is 20 years and over. The growth area for us, would you believe, is 40 years and over.

PAUL: *Oh, no, I — yeah.*

JIM: They had it in mind that the comic was being bought by 15-year-olds and down. Not so! That's a very small part of our market. But they had decided they would just keep pumping them out; they had forgotten, you know, that we're in a bit of a sophisticated time with comic books. So, our blend *now* is a mix of everything new, the stories I like best from Sweden, from the Semic Company — although I'm getting more selective as time goes on — and more and more of the *old* issues.

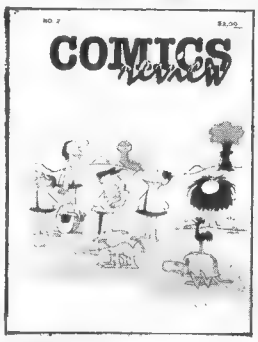
As much **Ray Moore** stuff as we can put together that's in its entirety. **Wilson McCoy** stories are not as popular as they once were — I think you can read anything you like into that. I'm sure he was a lovely guy and all that sort of stuff, but The Phantom was a bit short and dumpy; the movement wasn't there; it's not sophisticated enough. Sy **Barry's** work, great. Believe it or not, every time we bring out a story drawn by **Bill Lignante,**

BACK ISSUES

COMICS REVUE

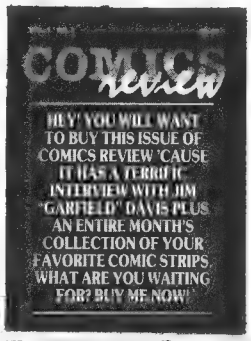
SINGLE - $5.00
ANY FOUR - $15.00

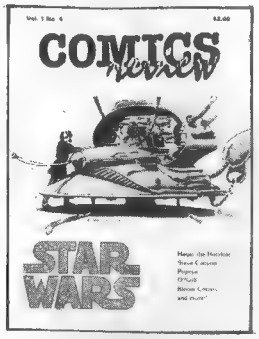
#1 Garfield, Peanuts, B.C., The Wizard of Id, Frank & Ernest, The Born Loser, Tumbleweeds, Bloom County



#2 Garfield, Peanuts, B.C., The Wizard of Id, Frank & Ernest, The Born Loser, Tumbleweeds, Bloom County

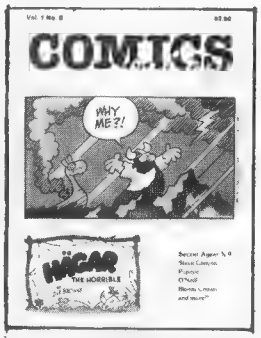
#3 B.C., The Wizard of Id, Bloom County, Beetle Bailey, Blondie, Marvin, Hagar the Horrible

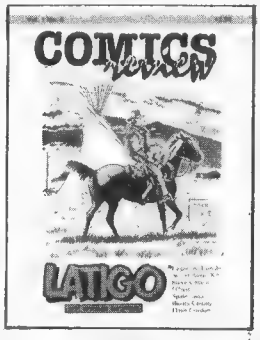

COMICS
Review
HEY! YOU WILL WANT TO BUY THIS ISSUE OF COMICS REVIEW 'CAUSE IT HAS A TERRIFIC INTERVIEW WITH JIM "GARFIELD" DAVIS PLUS AN ENTIRE MONTH'S COLLECTION OF YOUR FAVORITE COMIC STRIPS. WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? BUY ME NOW!



#4 Star Wars, Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon, O'Neill, The Amazing Spider-Man, Popeye, Bloom County

#5 Hagar the Horrible, Secret Agent Corrigan, Bloom County, The Amazing Spider-Man, Popeye, O'Neill, Steve Canyon



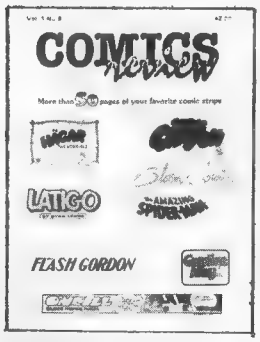


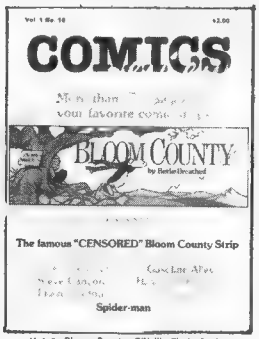
#6 Latigo, Popeye, Flash Gordon, The Amazing Spider-Man, O'Neill, Secret Agent Corrigan, Hagar the Horrible

#7 Gasoline Alley, Latigo, Secret Agent Corrigan, O'Neill, The Amazing Spider-Man, Hagar the Horrible, Gasoline Alley, Bloom County, Steve Canyon

#8 Steve Canyon, Secret Agent Corrigan, Bloom County, Latigo, O'Neill, Hagar the Horrible, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley, The Amazing Spider-Man

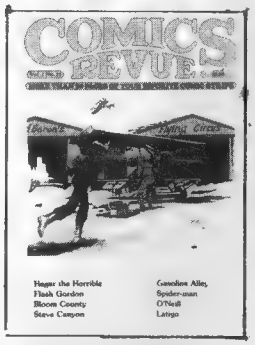
#9 Bloom County, O'Neill, Secret Agent Corrigan, Gasoline Alley, O'Neill, Steve Canyon, Latigo, Flash Gordon, Bloom County

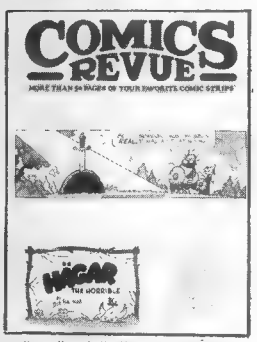




#10 Bloom County, O'Neill, Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon, The Amazing Spider-Man, Gasoline Alley, Secret Agent Corrigan

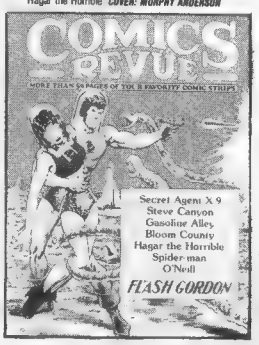
#11 Secret Agent Corrigan, Bloom County, Latigo, Steve Canyon, O'Neill, Gasoline Alley, Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible, The Amazing Spider-Man





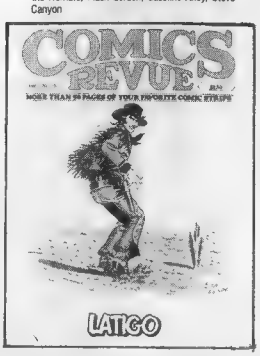
#12 Hagar the Horrible, Flash Gordon, Bloom County, O'Neill, Steve Canyon, Latigo, The Amazing Spider-Man, Secret Agent Corrigan, Gasoline Alley

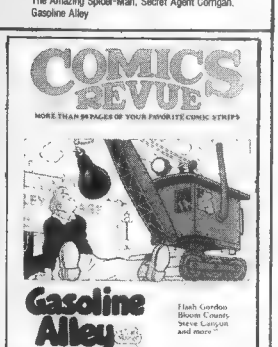
#13 Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley, Secret Agent Corrigan, Latigo, Bloom County, Steve Canyon, O'Neill, The Amazing Spider-Man, Hagar the Horrible. ***COVER: MURPHY ANDERSON***



#14 The Amazing Spider-Man, Bloom County, Steve Canyon, Gasoline Alley, O'Neill, Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible; Secret Agent Corrigan, Latigo

#15 Latigo, Secret Agent Corrigan, Bloom County, The Amazing Spider-Man, Hagar the Horrible, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley, Steve Canyon





#16 Gasoline Alley, The Amazing Spider-Man, Bloom County, Flash Gordon, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, Latigo, Secret Agent Corrigan

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"#1000 sold out — 70,000 times $10.00."

sales go through the roof!

PAUL: *Really?*

JIM: And yet **Lee Falk** was never very keen on Bill's work.

PAUL: *No, no. Bill Lignante used to work on the JONNY QUEST TV series, and now in New York he's a sketch artist for big court cases.*

JIM: Yeah. Well, the *story* may not ring a bell, but what happened was there was a story called "Queen Sumaris" that Bill drew. It was a daily strip, and in this he showed The Phantom's *eyes!* Did you ever hear of the famous trick of showing The Phantom's *ears* through the cowl?

PAUL: *Yeah!*

JIM: Well, in *this* story he actually drew The Phantom's *eyes,* and it got through the editors at King Features somehow. When it came through the *first* time, the first run in an approved comic, somebody picked it up and they painted out the eyes. When I decided to reprint it, I got hold of some repros from King Features and ran it. It's *history!* Let's have it!

PAUL: *Sure, sure.*

JIM: And that's what we've done right down the line. The Semic people in Sweden have never published "The Inexorables," which is the name of the story we call "The Phantom Goes to War." They believed it was too violent and racist — and they were right on both counts. But again, it appeared in America, so we ran it panel for panel. Despite the fact that yes, it *was* racist, we didn't hear a *word* of complaint — at a time when radio announcers were being mass-sacked for insulting minorities. Nobody said a word.

So, the mix is the *best* of the Swedish, all of Lee's new material, and the old, classic PHANTOM stories put back together. There's about three or four stories we've been unable to put together — or rather, King Features cannot supply us. *(Laughter.)* So, what we can do now is work from newspaper strips.

PAUL: *Do you know Bill Blackbeard in San Francisco?*

JIM: Not *directly,* but I certainly know all about him, that he's got this enormous collection. Yeah. Well, the *other* things we've been doing, and the end result of all this activity, is that the sales are up, an *enormous* jump. We sometimes get almost but not quite a 70% sale against the print run, and edition #1000 sold out — 70,000 times $10.00 is quite a big turnover.

PAUL: *That's wonderful. What I like about this special edition is the little color foldout.*

JIM: By **Sy Barry,** yeah. It's great! Oh, we had all the dramas in the world with *this* one. Three hours before it was due, I was at the printer, going through it all, and they had reversed about four pages — mainly of editorial, two pages of comics were around the wrong way — and they had dropped a little bit of stuff out of the contents page. Of course, it's now eight o'clock at night and the typesetters have gone home, so I did it myself, reset the contents page.

PAUL: *I've done similar things, but that makes it fun, too.*

JIM: Oh, sure, sure. This is the most *expensive* Australian comic that I can remember. I mean, $10.00 is a lot of money.

PAUL: *Yeah. What I like, I remember in the '60s you used to get the DC reprints that were like this.*

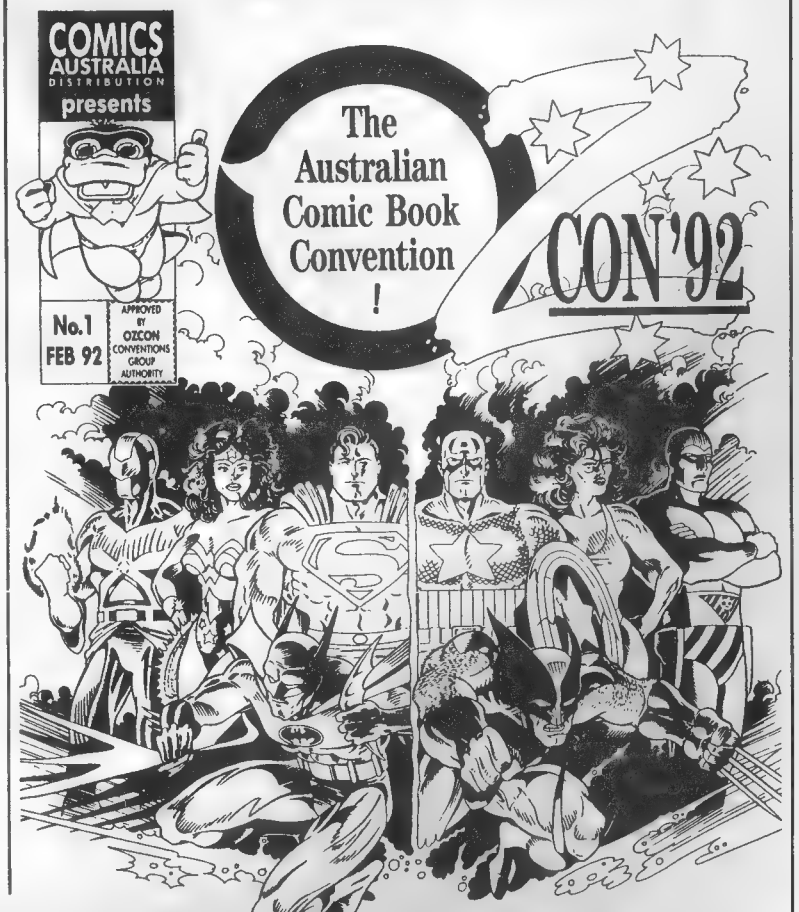
JIM: Well, you see, our market is not *big* enough to even contemplate *color,* for one thing, let alone stiff covers and binding. Graphic novels, we're light-years away from that. But to achieve a sale of 70,000 to 75,000 is *enormous!*

TAD PIETRZYKOWSKI: *By Australian standards it's over the moon.*

JIM: Yeah. But, you see, what the American publishers who come out here — I know quite a few of the guys — what they don't *quite* understand is the *success* of THE PHANTOM. They cannot understand why SPIDER-MAN, for example, is not #1 pursued by BATMAN, THE X-MEN, THE PUNISHER, et cetera. This little number, THE PHANTOM, it's a *cult* thing that is almost impossible to define. It's like the whole line of the story, the Phantom mantle is passed down through generation after generation; *so* is the appeal of the comic; it goes from father to son and it goes on and on. Really, I'm *sure* that's what it's all about. *(Laughter.)* The *other* thing is — did you see much of the television hype that led up to this?

PAUL: *Yeah, actually. I was at Frants Kantor's studio and it was on TV and everything, so I whipped out a quick color sketch just so I could be at the party, and they* accepted *it. I wanted to be a part of it; I didn't even know it was happening, then suddenly it was just*

Cover illustration to Australia's first comic con.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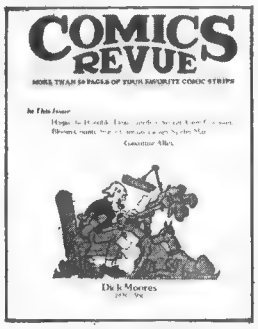
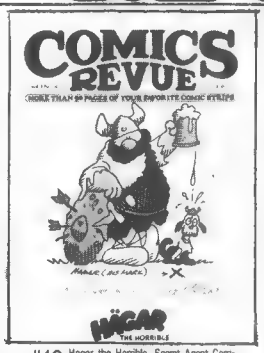
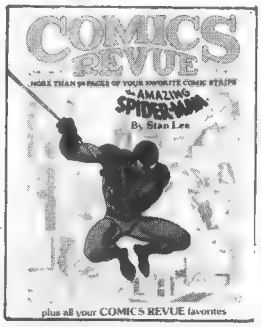




#18 Hagar the Horrible, Secret Agent Corrigan, Blondie, Steve Canyon, Bloom County, The Amazing Spider-Man, Gasoline Alley, Flash Gordon

#19 The Amazing Spider-Man, Bloom County, Secret Agent Corrigan, Latigo, Steve Canyon, Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible, Gasoline Alley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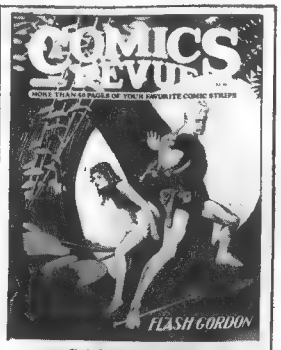
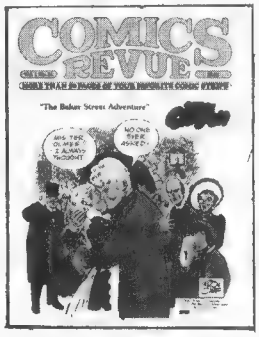
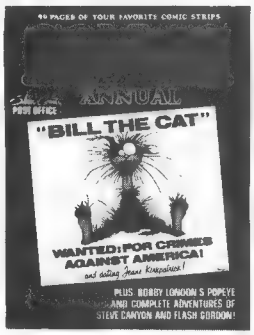


#20 Flash Gordon, Bloom County, Secret Agent Corrigan, Latigo, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, The Amazing Spider-Man, Gasoline Alley *COVER: TOM YEATES*

#21 Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, Latigo, Secret Agent Corrigan, Bloom County, The Amazing Spider-Man, Gasoline Alley

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and selling them Kumquats!
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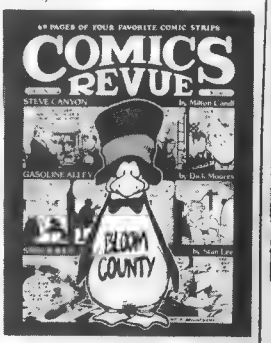
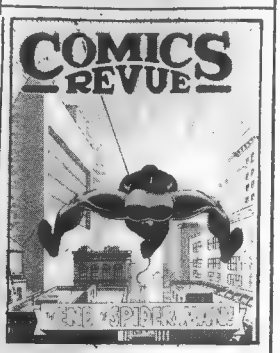
Annual 1 Bloom County, Steve Canyon, Popeye, Secret Agent Corrigan, Latigo, Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible, The Amazing Spider-Man, Gasoline Alley

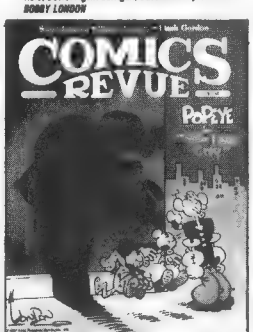
#22 Bloom County, Secret Agent Corrigan, The Amazing Spider-Man, Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley

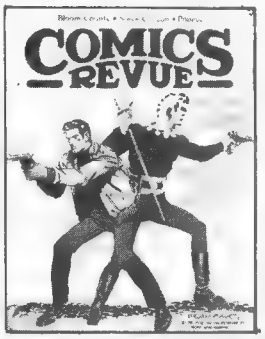




#23 The Amazing Spider-Man, Bloom County, Secret Agent Corrigan, Latigo, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley

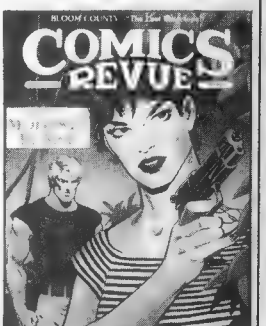
#24 Popeye, Flash Gordon, Latigo, Bloom County, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, Secret Agent Corrigan, Gasoline Alley *COVER: BOBBY LONDON*





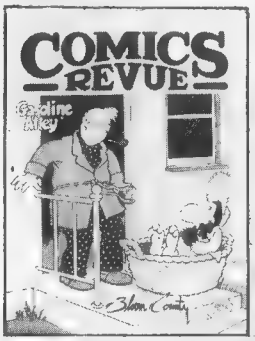
#25 Secret Agent Corrigan, Popeye, Latigo, Bloom County, Flash Gordon, Steve Canyon, Gasoline Alley *COVER: GEORGE EVANS*

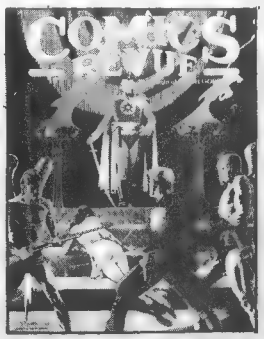
#26 Modesty Blaise, Bloom County, Latigo, Popeye, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley



#27 The Phantom, Bloom County, Modesty Blaise, Hagar the Horrible, Flash Gordon, Popeye, Steve Canyon, Gasoline Alley

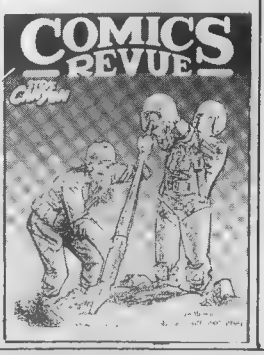
#28 Bloom County, Modesty Blaise, Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon, The Phantom, Popeye, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley *COVER:*

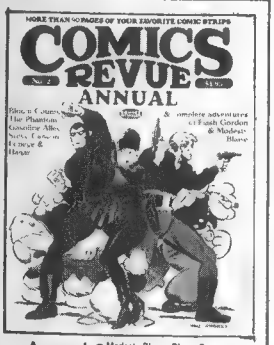




#29 Flash Gordon, Bloom County, The Phantom, Hagar the Horrible, Modesty Blaise Popeye, Gasoline Alley *COVER: TOM YEATES*

#30 Milton Caniff Memorial Issue. Steve Canyon





Annual 2 Modesty Blaise, Bloom County, The Phantom, Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon, Popeye, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley *COVER: FRENZ & FREDERICK*

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"This is *expensive*. I m... $10. is a lot of money."

there! It was everywhere. What I like about The Phantom — I think you'll agree with this — you could ask people in the street about Batman or Superman, their history or whatever, and they couldn't tell you too much, but you ask them about The Phantom and they can give you the background, who the characters are, where they came from, he is The Ghost Who Walks —

TAD: *The Man Who Cannot Die.*

PAUL: *Yeah.*

JIM: And that extends into the media. So many columnists and TV guys just *love* it. **David Lyle** on Channel 9, he has one of the biggest collections of PHANTOM comics in Australia — never get into an argument with him about who did what in such-and-such a story from 1942. I did 20 minutes on **Frank Cooke's** drive-time on government radio. We hit the news on Channel 10, Channel 9, Channel 7, SPS — missed out on ABC, but even better then we were in their 7:30 report. They only had three stories, one about the Gulf War, the other about a strike, and the *third* story on the most *important* news program on television was the launch of the 1000th edition of THE PHANTOM.

PAUL: *How long did that run for?*

JIM: About eight minutes, nationally.

PAUL: *Wonderful, wonderful!*

JIM: And then, of course, that same night there was a second channel 9 story. The same morning there was an interview I did on Channel 10 that had been prerecorded. Just think of the hits, the impacts, that were made in *one day* around the country, that's just astonishing. And press coming out of our ears. **Lee Falk** was live on air.

TAD: *Actually, that brings me to a point that I wanted to ask you about: During the interview he said that he writes everything for the daily and the Sunday strips. What I wondered, with the local content material, the stories that you yourself have written as part of the local input into it, does King Features have to approve?*

JIM: Oh, yes! Not only the stories but, naturally, the art. We must fax every cover over to New York for approval. There's a reason for this. When you think about it, The Phantom must be about the only major comic-strip character in the *world* who is written and drawn by Americans in America, by the Swedish company, and now by us — and I think the Swedes have maybe ten different artists at various times do it. So The Phantom is starting to look a little bit odd on occasion. He's not uniform anywhere in the world. What King is trying to

"I didn't realize how difficult it was."

Steve Ditko's pencils (here) and Bill Reinhold's inks (next page), from Marvel's PHANTOM 2040 (cartoon-based).

--ALONE!
WHAT? IT WAS A DREAM. I CAN'T GET AWAY FROM GURAN'S TRAINING EVEN IN SLEEP. BUT NOW I CAN TELL HIM ONE OF THE THINGS HE WANTED TO KNOW.
ELSEWHERE...
I'M... THE PHANTOM!
I CAN TELL HIM I'M AFRAID OF BEING ABANDONED. JUST LIKE WHEN I WAS TWO YEARS OLD ...AND MY PARENTS WERE GONE. I THOUGHT I HAD DEALT WITH THAT...
BUT FINDING OUT MY DAD WAS THE PHANTOM... IT'S LIKE I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT HIM... AND, YET, THAT I'VE LOST HIM AGAIN...
FINE. TELL ME WHERE TO FIND HIM, AND I'LL BRING HIM BACK TO YOU. HE'S JUST A MAN. HE'S NOT A GIANT OR ANYTHING.
ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME, ALLOY? THAT'S YOUR TARGET.
UHH... UHH... READY TO -- UH, GIVE?
HARDLY. I WANT TO SHOW YOU BOTH A LITTLE TRICK I JUST ACQUIRED. SHOW MS. MADISON THAT HER MONEY IS BEING WELL-SPENT ON ME.

"The Phantom mantle is passed through genera-

The Phantom
by
LEE FALK
and
RAY MOORE
PRINCE PEPE THINKS UP SOME BEAUTS! WAIT HERE, HERO:
THE PHANTOM'S 4TH TASK: TO CAPTURE OR DESTROY THE TRIBE OF THE GREAT APES OF PTJAR!
THE GREAT APES WATCH HIM WITH SURPRISE. IN THE PAST ALL CREATURES FLED AT THE SIGHT OF THEM!
THE LEADER ROARS, AS HE MOVES ON THE SLIM STRANGER. THE PHANTOM SLIPS BETWEEN THE MIGHTY ARMS AND PLANTS A DYNAMITE PUNCH---
A SECOND BLOW, AND THE LEADER CRASHES TO THE GROUND, BEATEN BEFORE HIS TRIBE--AND BY THEIR CODE--NO LONGER LEADER!
WISE IN THE WAYS OF THE JUNGLE, THE PHANTOM KNOWS HE MUST DEFEAT ALL CHALLENGERS FOR LEADERSHIP OF THE GREAT APES. A YOUNG BULL RUMBLES TOWARDS HIM-
KNOWING NO MAN COULD SURVIVE IN THOSE GREAT ARMS--- THE PHANTOM GETS IN FIRST WITH HIS POWERHOUSE BLOWS--THE APES KNOW NOTHING OF THE ART OF FISTICUFFS!
JUNGLE POETS HAVE SUNG OF THE PHANTOM'S STRENGTH-"THE POWER OF THE ELEPHANT, THE SPEED OF THE TIGER."--HE WAITS, WARILY. ANY MORE CHALLENGERS? CONT'D.

Above and below: Two great examples of Phantom strips from 1947, by Falk & Moore.

The Phantom
by
LEE FALK
and
RAY MOORE
THOUGH HE'S NOT OF THEIR KIND, HE'S DEFEATED THEIR GREATEST BULLS. NO OTHERS DARE CHALLENGE HIM--- THUS, BY THEIR ANCIENT CUSTOM---
THE PHANTOM BECOMES LEADER OF THE PTJAR APES, AND THEY MUST FOLLOW WHERE THEIR LEADER GOES!
ZOO
---AND HE LEADS THEM TO THE ZOO--- WHERE THEY ARE SAFELY PLACED BEHIND BARS! THUS ENDS THE REIGN OF TERROR OF THE GREAT APES OF PTJAR! AND THE PHANTOM COMPLETES HIS 5TH TASK!
YOU MUST GET RID OF HIM! HE'S BECOMING A NATIONAL HERO!
HOW--HOW? HE DOES EVERYTHING---THE IMPOSSIBLE!
TRY SHARKS' BAY, YOUR HIGHNESS!
CLEAR THE BAY OF ALL SHARKS? NO ONE CAN DO THAT---NOT IN YEARS! YET---IF HE FAILS, I MUST MARRY---UGH- PEPE---
NEWS OF THE PHANTOM'S 6TH TASK COMES TO DIANA IN THE TOWER.
PEPE PICKED A CORKER THIS TIME! THOUSANDS OF SHARKS--HUNDREDS OF SQUARE MILES OF WATER--A MILE DEEP--- ONE DAY TO DO THE JOB---!
THE PHANTOM BROODS OVER THE VAST EXPANSE OF SHARKS' BAY---
ONLY ONE WAY I CAN THINK OF. IF IT DOESN'T WORK--- PEPE WINS--I LOSE DIANA--AND MY LIFE---
OBTAINING A RACING BOAT, HE WHIZZES OVER THE SHARK-INFESTED WATERS--WHAT WILL HE DO? CONT'D.

tions; *so* is the appeal of the comic, father to son."

achieve — wisely so, in my opinion — is *some* form of uniformity. They've been asking us, obviously, and Semic, to make The Phantom look as close as possible to Sy **Barry's** work, which is not altogether *easy!*

PAUL: *I kind of liked when Sy Barry first took over THE PHANTOM — who did he take over, from Ray Moore, was it?*

JIM: No, he took over from **Bill Lignante,** actually. It went **Ray Moore, Wilson McCoy,** very briefly **Bill Lignante,** and then **Sy Barry.** But Sy, his style changed. You see, we use up to four different guys doing the covers. The best of the lot is **Terry Welsby** — he's sort of **Sy Barryish.** He, fortunately, can copy anybody. **Keith Chanter** has his own quite unique style. I think he's the first guy who admits he can't *quite* capture The Phantom. He exaggerates the chin and has trouble with the mask. Glen is very good, but Glen gets very stylistic as well. He puts his own little imprint on it. And that's what King are trying to avoid. They've got a job and a half! Some of the artists Semic uses — and, by the way, they're not all Swedes —

PAUL: *Yeah, Italians —*

JIM: Yeah. Funny story — some years ago we had a story called "The Black Fire," which is The Phantom's first visit to Australia — which, naturally, sales went through the roof!

PAUL: *Who drew that?*

JIM: It was **Carlos Cruz** from Spain. It was commissioned by a Swedish company, written by **Norman Worker,** who lives in London, and drawn by **Carlos Cruz** in Spain, so no wonder they had a few little things go wrong. I wrote about it in the editorial. People write to us all the time to say there's one too many or too few buttons on the uniform of the soldier, or the pirate ship was incorrectly rigged; we have *boxes* of that sort of stuff. So, I wrote an editorial to say: Hey, guys, I *know* that there are some mistakes. You will not find a koala sitting on Ayres Rock; even The Phantom could not walk from the north coast to central Australia in a couple of days without even a water bottle; et cetera. But for *months* we kept getting letters about the musket that one of the soldiers were holding was *wrong* — and of course they were right; he'd used a clipping from an encyclopedia. Some of the Australian native animals were not quite right, but coming from Sweden and England and Spain, that's not too bad.

PAUL: *It's like when I used to work on AIR HAWK for John Dixon. The biggest thing he would go for was: Draw whatever you like but have your research there; make sure it's correct. He was just very, very thorough.*

JIM: But *all* artists have their strengths! Keith is brilliant on anything mechanical, the equipment, cars, airplanes. During the war, I gather, he used to illustrate "spot the aircraft" type manuals. And he's brilliant on jungle scenes, animals. He occasionally falls away, and he's the first to admit it, on the characters. **Glen Ford,** brilliant on certain things and not so good on others. Very big on the blacks and shadows and lighting effects when they're not really necessary. This guy, I only wish I could use him more often, because he can copy anybody. He should be forging bank drafts. *(Laughter.)*

TAD: *Given that you've got a well of Australian talent that you're using now, does that make it open for, say, submissions from other Australian talents who are up and coming, who may be able to fit into that mold as well?*

JIM: Yeah, that's what I plan. We've got all sorts of things in the pipeline. But color printing here, it would cost us a *fortune.*

TAD: *With this 1000th issue in the sealed format you've also got a reprint of issue #1. I've looked through it and it looks like an exact reprint of issue #1. Now, for say authenticity, is there any difference between that and the original #1?*

JIM: Oh, yeah. By the way, we had to *copy* the original comic. What I did, if you turn to page 2, any dealer — and I'd written to them all anyway — knows what the little secret is. Otherwise, it's spot on; I don't think we made any other change. I decided against putting "replica" on it because it's *not* a replica; that's the *only* subtle difference, dropping one line of type from page 2.

TAD: *In America some years ago DC did an oversized reprint of ACTION COMICS #1. It was authentic in just about every respect except it was oversized, and some people were shrewd enough, and other people were gullible enough, to take it for an original ACTION COMICS #1. That's why I was concerned about this, because it seems to be no different.*

PAUL: *But there's always, like if you want to sell the Brooklyn Bridge, somebody that doesn't know any better.*

TAD: *Exactly.*

JIM: But, you see, it was an interesting sales result. We sold out in Sydney in probably two and a half days, and one of the reasons was that people were rushing in and taking two or three or four. One guy bought directly from us, 2000. He said, "I'm putting these away. In about ten years I'll make a fortune." What he doesn't realize is that there's probably another 10,000 or 15,000 that are being put away for future sale. There won't be a market for them. We're only sitting on a couple of hundred.

Phantom's creator, Lee Falk — during a recent comic con. (Note the statue — far left.)

Photo by Paul Power

"We've pretty much finished writing and produc-

THE NEWS IS SPREAD THRU THE JUNGLE~
MEN FROM SEA ON YELLOW BEACH...
~TO THE DEEP WOODS AND THE FABULOUS SKULL THRONE
~ON YELLOW BEACH
WILSON McCOY 1-15
AS THE TOM-TOM MESSAGE SPREADS THRU THE JUNGLE~
MEN FROM SEA ON YELLOW BEACH...
WHAT IS IT? A SHIP-WRECK?
WE KNOW NOT, O GHOST WHO WALKS. THEY DO NOT SPEAK OUR TONGUE.
I SPEAK ENGLISH
WE'RE FROM THE S.S. GAY.
A GANGSTER MOB TOOK OVER THE SHIP.
~THEY PUT THE MEN IN LIFEBOATS BUT KEPT THE WOMEN ABOARD!
S.S.GAY! DIANA AND HER MOTHER ARE ON THAT SHIP!
THUGS AND THE S.S. GAY~~ LIFEBOATS~~NOW NATIVES AND A MASKED MAN. IT'S A NIGHTMARE!
WHAT ARE YOU HEARING?
WE HAD THIS SET IN THE LIFEBOAT. SEEMS SOME NAVAL SHIPS FOUND THE 'GAY'~BUT CAN DO NOTHING BECAUSE THE WOMEN ARE ABOARD~
PLANES, SUBS, DESTROYERS~ALL FOLLOWING~ALL HELPLESS! WHAT A SET-UP!
ALL MOVING AT 15 KNOTS~SHOULD BE OFF POINT VALE AT MIDNIGHT.
WHAT'S THE PHANTOM UP TO?
POINT VALE AT MIDNIGHT!
WILSON McCOY 1-17
I NEED YOUR FASTEST WAR CANOE~YOUR STRONGEST PADDLERS.
THEY ARE YOURS, O GHOST WHO WALKS.

More old strips — these, from 1955. Wilson McCoy did the art.

ing the definitive history of THE PHANTOM."

PAUL: *It would be nice if you put them up for sale in overseas markets. Or does your license not allow that?*

JIM: Yeah, we're very restricted to Australia and New Zealand and New Guinea. Fiji, if we wish, but we don't even touch Fiji. But, we have subscriptions from people in Japan and Spain and Greece and all sorts of strange places.

We do have another thing in the pipeline for the movie. We've already pretty much finished writing and producing a thing called THE LEGEND OF THE PHANTOM, the definitive history of THE PHANTOM with all the American and Swedish artists, and all the writers. I'll, obviously, sit on that and ride in under the movie. We contracted to do it, with King Features, so that's not a problem. That will go like gangbusters here, and it'll be, like, $35.00 because there will be lots of color in it.

PAUL: *What I've found with THE PHANTOM, that I lost contact with — I'd follow it every now and then in a couple of papers in the States, and read it when I come back to Sydney — in picking it up this time I go: Look at this, here's this guy Jim Sheppard and he's got an editorial page, there's a contact number, there's the whole fan response thing, and the stories are full and the art isn't cropped like it used to be. It really is a very nice product.*

JIM: Yeah. Well, we *had* to do something like that. We had to get into the current century. The reason for the letters page, I'll be honest, is to find out who all the buyers are. Now we know. It's not children at all. But getting back to another point, one of the reasons . . . so *many* key people in the media are Phantom buffs, so any time we have an interesting story, or a little paragraph, one telephone call is sufficient. They all ring around to each other and suddenly it all magically happens. So, for the 1000th issue, what would it cost you to get a full page in THE NORTHERN AGE, which we've had? Editorial, very serious, big in-depth stuff. And the same story is repeated in THE ACCOLADE, in THE ADVERTISER, in THE WEST AUSTRALIAN. We've been in THE BULLETIN, we've been in L MAGAZINE, we've been in FIN REVIEW, it just goes on and on and on.

The reason gets back to this simple bottom line. The guys who are the writers and are in radio and TV, they're also Phantom buffs. So it all happens. Anything new, they want to write about it. I have a clipping book that is just so thick it is ridiculous. And that's something the opposition will never achieve out here.

The cover copy sez it all! (Art by Keith Chanter).

It's just impossible.

PAUL: *What I thought, especially in reading this story, "Enter The Phantom" —*

JIM: Which is actually "The Slave Traders" but it being #1 they had to have some sort of a title on it.

PAUL: *Yeah. But Lee Falk's dialogue, the way The Phantom was just this very rugged guy. And also this other story, the boxing story —*

JIM: "The Masked Marvel."

PAUL: *He's just a straight-ahead guy. He seemed to me, while being an American, very much like an Aussie, like a really just tough guy.*

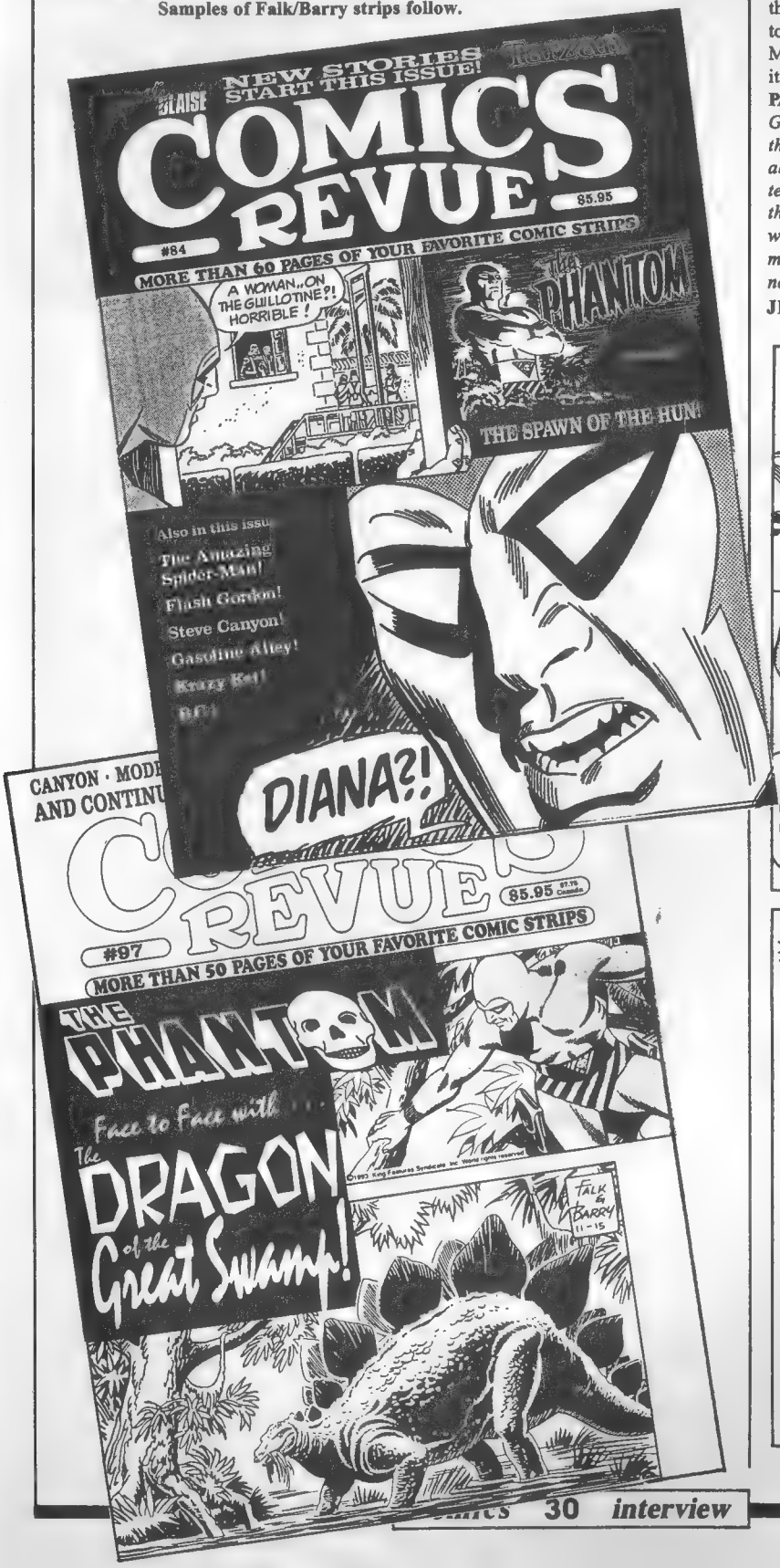
JIM: Sure.

PAUL: *And it was snappy dialogue, just very straight-ahead.*

JIM: Well, that's interesting because I encouraged people to write in to let me know which stories they would really love to see reprinted for the big issue. The one that won hands-down was the wedding story, and what they got in this was the Sunday version instead of the daily version. Right behind that was "The Masked Marvel." That was very astonishing. Out of the hundreds of stories written — and this is all American material —

"THE PHANTOM is believable. What he does, how he

Two examples of COMICS REVUE's "covering" The Phantom. Samples of Falk/Barry strips follow.



those two stories. I'm still trying to come to grips with that. Why "The Masked Marvel"? Maybe you've just explained it.

PAUL: *It's just great, kind of like a John Garfield or a Jimmy Cagney kind of thing. And the other part that I liked about it — here's the family saying it's terrible he's a pugilist now, that whole thing about being anti-boxing, then when he becomes the champ it's okay, maybe he can come round for dinner now.* (Laughter.)

JIM: It's so believable, isn't it?

speaks, his *feeling* for life, evil, good — it's believable."

PAUL: *True, true.*
TAD: *Maybe that's the key to its universal appeal.*
JIM: The guys who *really* study THE PHANTOM put it down to that. He is believable. Forget the underpants and all that stuff. What he does, the way he speaks, his *feeling* for life, and evil and good and stuff, it's all believable. What the American publishers cannot understand is here's a guy who doesn't drink, doesn't smoke, doesn't shoot anybody, there's no gore on the page — why does it work? It's straight-forward. He's almost a goodie two-shoes in many ways. He's happily married; it *works!* Those are the reasons it *does* work. That seems to escape them and they can't quite come to grips with that. It's interesting.
PAUL: *The other thing I like is in reading MANDRAKE — but that's a whole other ball of wax again, a different style of writing —*
JIM: Well, I decided to launch MANDRAKE — *old MANDRAKE from the late '30s and early '40s — thinking I might tap into yet another adult market. And we've been pretty correct. It's not THE PHANTOM in terms of sales, but it is* growing and it's more than making money. The old stuff is brilliant!
PAUL: *I had a great collection of Australian comics — which since has been ripped off; that's unfortunate — and I got turned on to the early MANDRAKE, which was pretty different from the MANDRAKE of the '60s. I think Phil Davis was still drawing it at the time.*
JIM: I think that would be the end of the trail.
PAUL: *Yeah. But it got to be very sort of straight ahead adventure stuff, whereas*

HERE IS THE REAL LEADER, BON. HOLD HIM FOR THEIR JUDGMENT!
DAM
FALK & BARRY 12-30
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NOT SO BRAVE WITHOUT YOUR FALSE GIANT.
THEY'LL KILL US, SAVE US, PHANTOM!
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"We had that 'Rumble in the Jungle' story, by

the early stuff was full-on fantasy, just amazing stuff. It was almost like The Phantom's adventures. I'm glad you are reprinting this stuff because it is impossible to buy as a collector's item. It's good that the readers that are following the dailies now get to see where it started, just a completely wild fantasy comic strip.

JIM: The first one that we did was certainly not the first MANDRAKE story, "Mandrake in the Lost World." I occasionally go back and read them to look for ideas I can pinch for a PHANTOM story. It's just out of this world.

Here (and four pages further into this interview): Jim's *very* popular story — art by Gary Chalonger.

"RUMBLE IN THE JUNGLE"
FOR THOSE WHO CAME IN LATE:
400 YEARS AGO, THE SOLE SURVIVOR OF A PIRATE RAID WAS WASHED UP ON A REMOTE BANGALLA SHORE AND FOUND BY FRIENDLY PYGMIES...
ON THE SKULL OF HIS FATHER'S KILLER, HE SWORE AN OATH... THE OATH OF THE SKULL!
I'LL DEVOTE MY LIFE TO DESTROY PIRACY, CRUELTY AND INJUSTICE. MY DESCENDANTS WILL FOLLOW ME!
THIS MAN WAS THE FIRST PHANTOM!
GENERATIONS FOLLOWED HIM, WITH SEAFARERS AND JUNGLE FOLK THINKING HIM THE SAME MAN... IMMORTAL!
THE GHOST WHO WALKS...
...THE MAN WHO CANNOT DIE!
WEARING THE SKULL RING ON HIS RIGHT FIST, HE IS NOW THE NEMESIS OF EVIL-DOERS EVERYWHERE.
21ST OF HIS LINE... OUR PHANTOM!

the way; a 78% sale against the print run."

(Telephone interruption.)

PAUL: *Jim's just been talking with a distributor.*

JIM: No wonder I'm smiling all of the time. *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *What I liked about the exhibition, you had a lot of the top guys in the fine arts, and politicians and businessmen, turn up to donate for the Starlight Foundation, but also to enjoy the character of the Phantom.*

JIM: Yeah.

PAUL: *The respect for this comic book character is on par to the way comics are treated in Europe.*

JIM: Exactly, yeah. Well, **Jack Thompson** was there, you may have noticed, a film star of quite some repute. He's a Phantom freak. He told me he is trying to get together a complete collection of THE PHANTOM. He's way down the track.

PAUL: *Wow!*

JIM: It's this sort of involvement that is *unique!*

PAUL: *It's great! I've always enjoyed it. I especially enjoyed Ray Moore's work.*

JIM: He began it, yes. This is **Ray Moore** helped by **Wilson McCoy,** because at this stage Ray was virtually at the end of his career. He got injured in the war, had head injuries which affected, of *all* things, his drawing hand. And that's **Wilson McCoy** you're looking at now.

PAUL: *The reaction to Wilson McCoy — do they like him as much?*

JIM: That's the interesting thing. You put out a single **Wilson McCoy** story and it doesn't sell as well as an old **Ray Moore** or a modern **Sy Barry,** but it ended up as the second most requested story. The proof is in the figures we get back from the distributor, you know. It worked. But this, this is a history book spanning 1936 to almost 1990, so if you're into it you're looking at different styles of art, of lettering, of storytelling, of backgrounds, of fashions, *everything.*

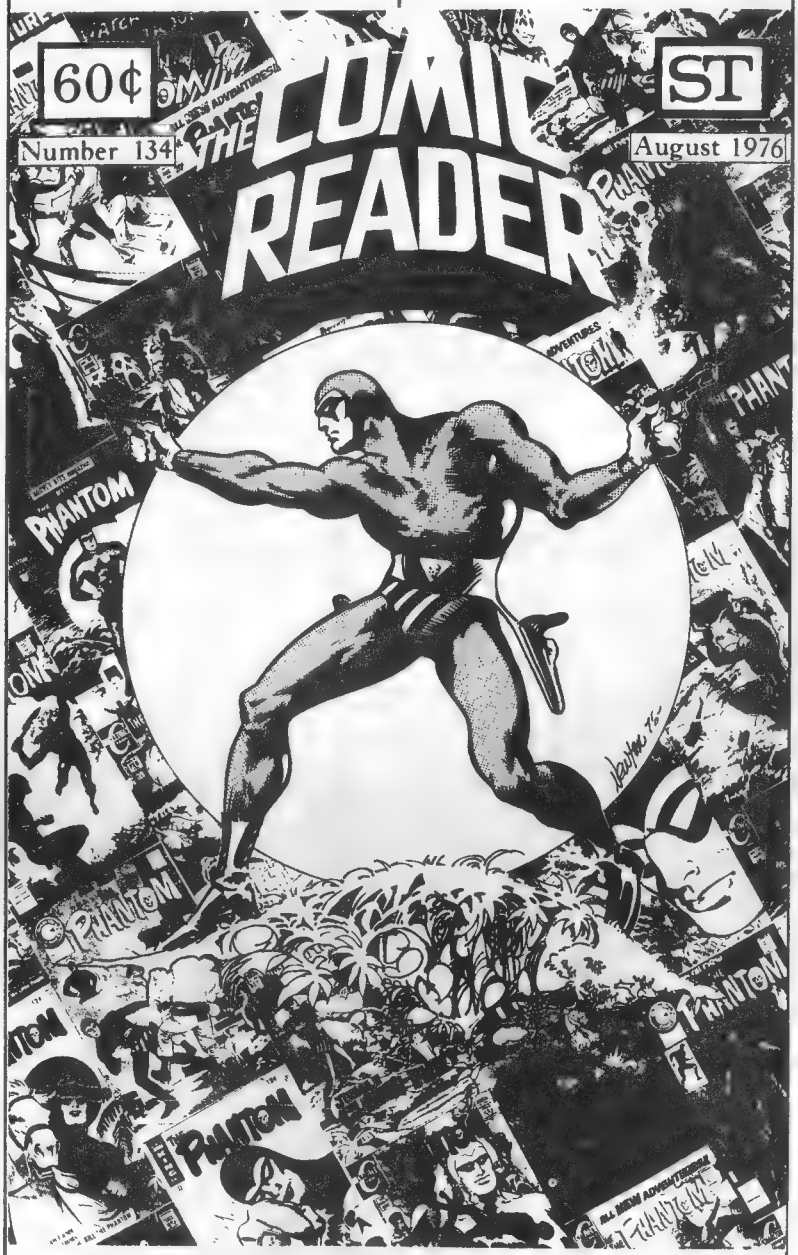
PAUL: *Yeah. The funny thing about this guy, Wilson McCoy, I like the stories that Wilson McCoy was illustrating; I wasn't too keen on Wilson McCoy's work. But as I get older, looking back at it, the simplicity — it grows on me.*

JIM: Yeah. This is where we're sort of painting ourselves into a little bit of a corner here. The *older* readers, the vintage readers, really don't care *who* drew it; they just love the character and love the stories. But that small but growing percentage of mainly boys, very few girls, around 15 to 18 area, *always* comment on the standard of the art. There are some brilliant artists working for Semic, the really intricate style they have there's always comment upon it. And that's the reason they like **Sy Barry's** work, vintage **Sy Barry** at least, where he went to so much trouble. They are not that keen on the original material.

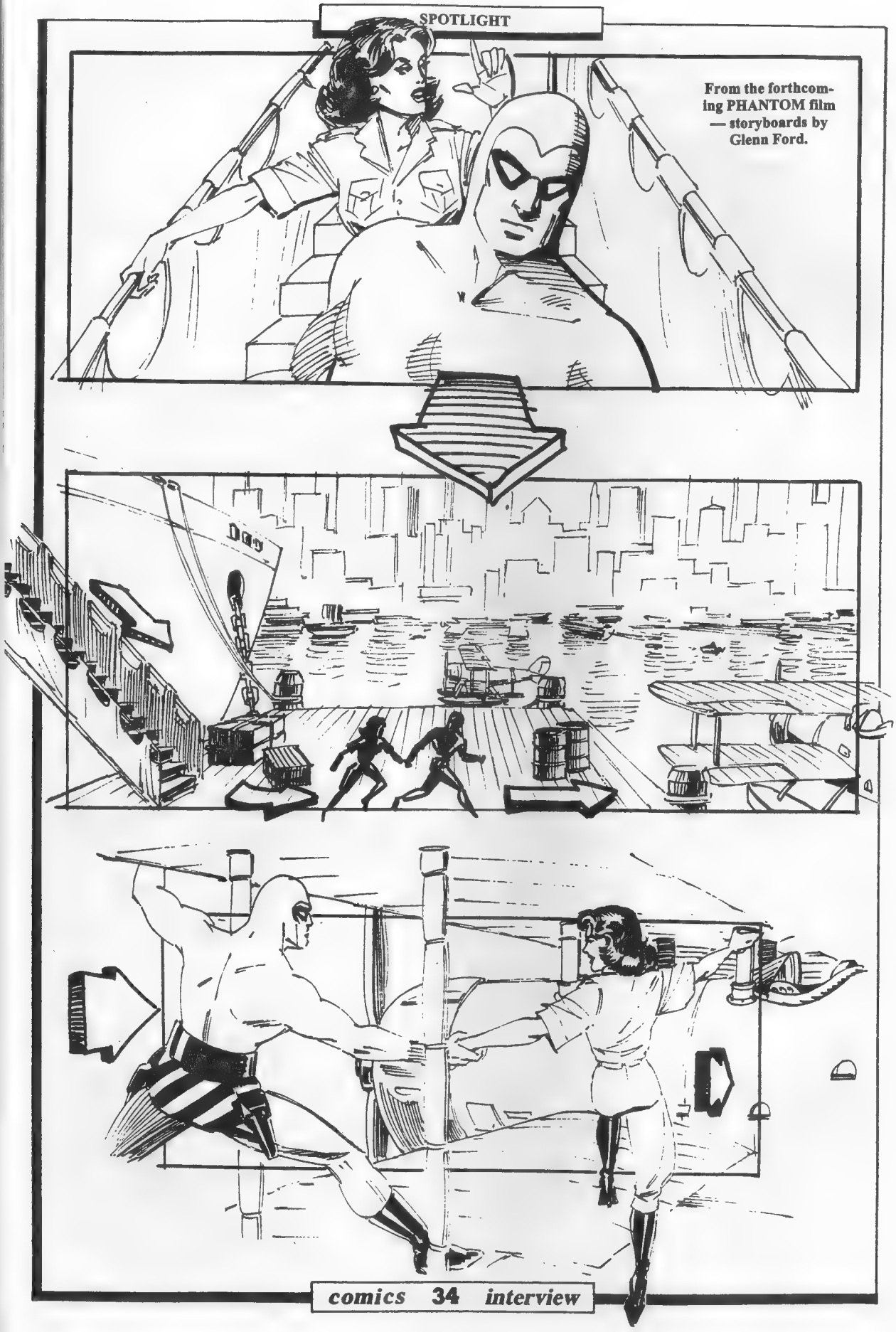
I think they're going for the art more than the story and the character, so it's rather difficult to *balance* all of this. So, what's why we have this what may appear at first glance to be a bit of a strange mix of stories, of current and old and new Swedish and then something else. But it works. They're never quite sure what's coming next. I'll write another couple of stories this year, and I just hope I have more luck than I did with the first one, which was obviously based on **Mike Tyson.** Of course, the issue went on sale a week after **Mike Tyson** had lost his title. That was the whole point; I thought he'd still be world champion.

PAUL: *Everybody did. Nobody bet on Douglas, no.*

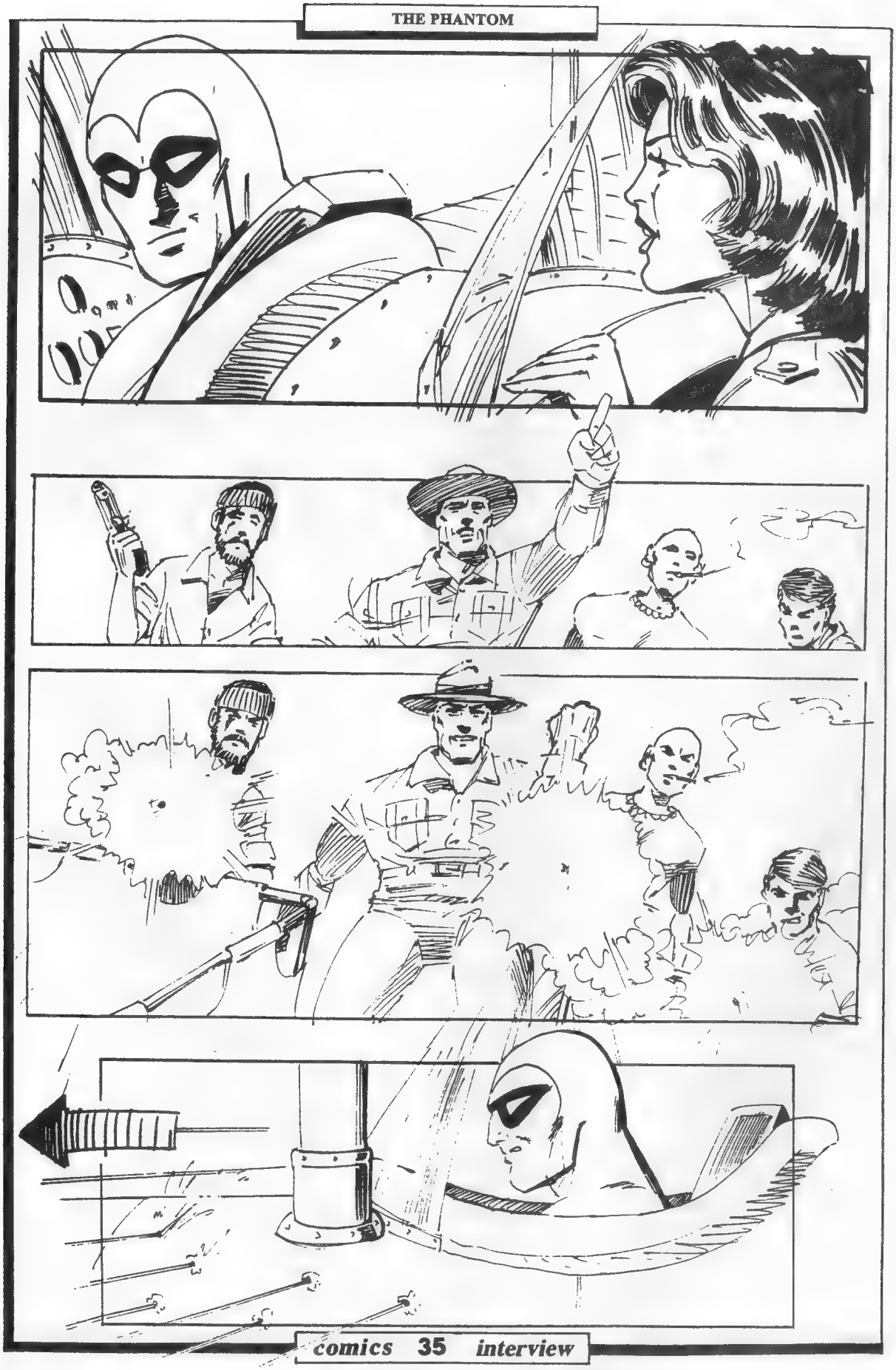
JIM: And of course, the idea was to bring



From 1976 — Don Newton's cover for THE COMIC READER #134.



From the forthcoming PHANTOM film — storyboards by Glenn Ford.

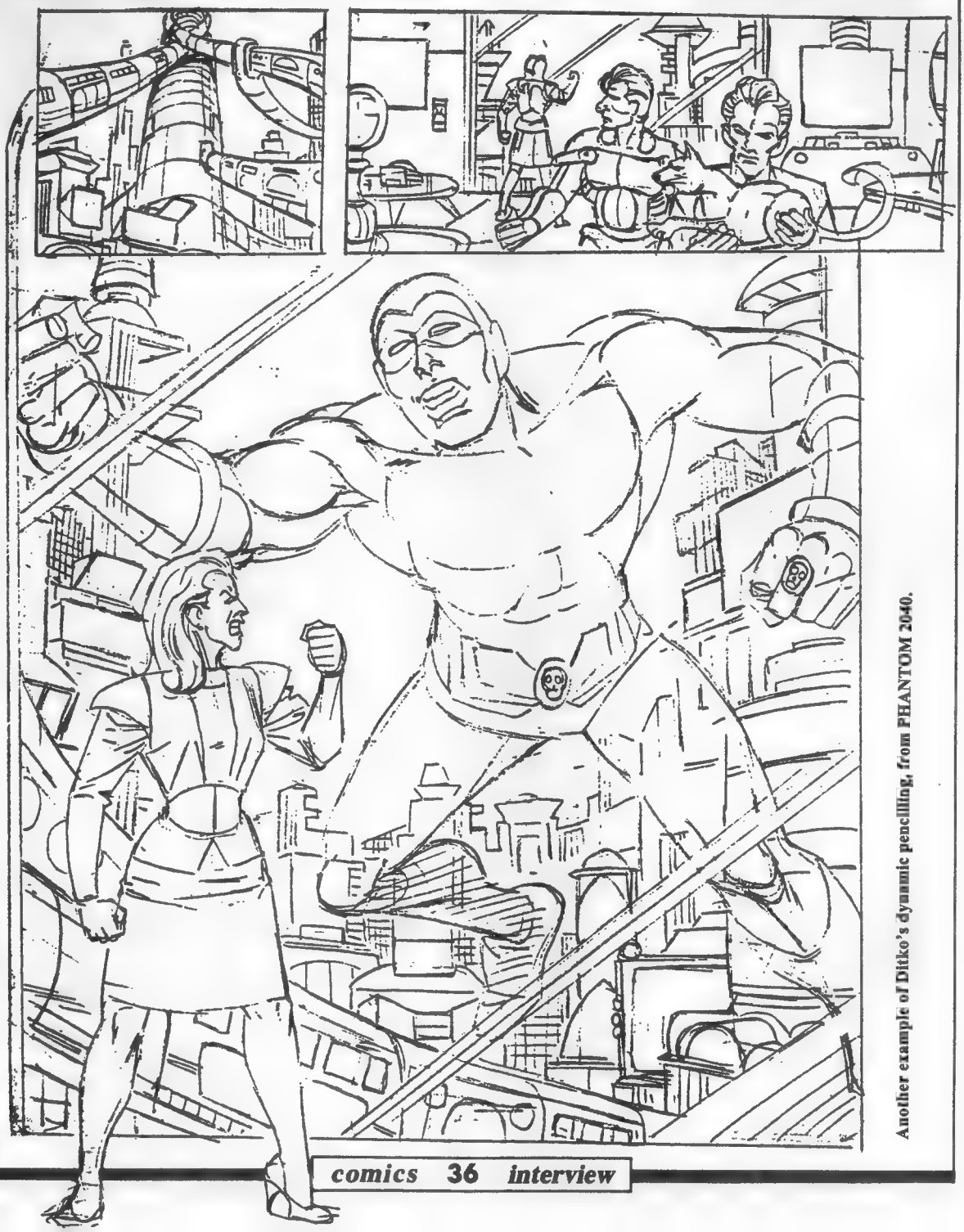


"We have a mix of stories, current and old and new."

the character Nocturna back into the story at some later stage. But we'll have another one. I think I'll follow that line of having The Phantom in a current setting, but back in the jungle. That's another thing; the readers *love* to see him in the jungle. We'll have him in Australia. There are so *many* great Australian mysteries. Quite obviously The Phantom will solve at least one. And that's what **Keith Chatter** will do. He's *so* good on animals and such. And certainly there will be a great injection of aircraft, because he loves aircraft. I think that'll fire. It's just amazing the response we had to that "Rumble in the Jungle" story, by the way; a 78% sale against the print run, which was astonishing. And then I think we supplied about 2000 direct sales, then we had 50 copies left over and that's it; those were destroyed.

PAUL: *The decision to do an original Australian story — was that a hard decision to make? Were you a bit worried about it? Were you a bit nervous about it?*

JIM: Well, the answer is yes. *(Laugh-*



Another example of Ditko's dynamic pencilling, from PHANTOM 2040.

"With the 1000th issue you've also got a reprint of #1."

ME... APOLOGISE ?! TO THEM..! LISTEN MR. PHANTOM... DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM..?
YES...
...YES, I KNOW VERY WELL WHO YOU ARE... MIKE TURNER, THE UNDEFEATED HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION..! THE IDOL OF MILLIONS... PROBABLY THE RICHEST, SO-CALLED SPORTSMAN IN THE WORLD..!
YEAH...!
A MAN WHO HAS SHOWN HE IS AN IGNORANT BULLY... AND IF HITTING A MAN MUCH SMALLER THAN YOURSELF IS ANY GUIDE... A COWARDLY BULLY WHO NEEDS TO BE TAUGHT A LESSON..!
OH YEAH..?
THERE HAVE BEEN SOME GREAT HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONS, TURNER... REAL MEN... JIM CORBETT, JACK DEMPSEY, GENE TUNNEY, JOE LOUIS, ROCKY MARCIANO, FLOYD PATTERSON MUHAMMED ALI...
YOU DON'T DESERVE BEING MENTIONED IN THE SAME BREATH...
WHAT..?!!

More from Jim's "Rumble" story — a sellout in Australia!

ter.) But, you know, I was and I still am a professional writer. I've had 18 books published, mainly on Australian sport. It just seemed logical to me that Lee would go for it, because I discovered a couple of years ago that he has a great interest in prize fighting. He and I had long chats about the old days and the heavyweights and so on, and I think that's what sold him, originally. And the story — I *learned* a lot! I didn't realize how difficult it was. I had never ever tackled a fictional thing. But I think so much exposure to these comics, when you're surrounded by them every day, *something* rubbed off. *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *Were you always a PHANTOM fan as a kid?*

JIM: Yeah, I was. Not *just* THE PHANTOM. My favorites, no particular order: BUCK ROGERS, obviously, the original; one that no one will ever remember called SGT. STONY CRAIG — I *loved* it; DON WINSLOW; DICK TRACY; and I always had a great feel for JOE PALOOKA.

PAUL: *Oh, I loved JOE PALOOKA. I've got a great JOE PALOOKA collection, yeah.*

JIM: You know, I think I could make money out of JOE PALOOKA today. Boxing is booming again here. I'm sure we could do something with that.

PAUL: *And see, Palooka was another character I felt had a very sort of nice personna. In many ways, just my opinion, Evander Holifield, the way he carries himself, is like a black Joe Palooka. He's very much a family man, he keeps to himself, he's very much on the straight and narrow, very religious, very down to earth, and dedicated to the sport.*

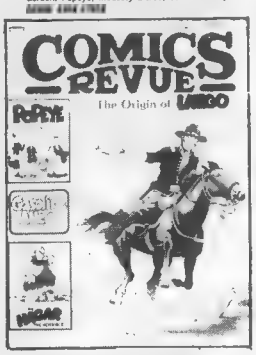
JIM: Sure. Take it even one step further. Look at any of the ROCKY movies. There's quite a bit of JOE PALOOKA in that. Joe, I believe, was not a great fighter, but very brave and very tough. He used to take enormous punishment. Great stuff, great ideas. I remember a comic where he was fighting Roughhouse Spalanki, who was supposed to be help-

BACK ISSUES

COMICS REVUE

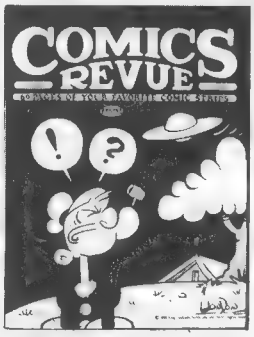
SINGLE - $5.00
ANY FOUR - $15.00

#31 Latigo, Bloom County, The Phantom, Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon, Flash Gordon, Popeye, Modesty Blaise, Gasoline Alley



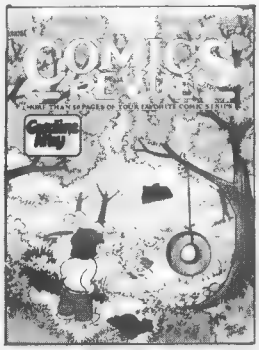
#32 Bloom County, The Phantom, Popeye, Latigo, Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible, Modesty Blaise, Steve Canyon, Gasoline Alley

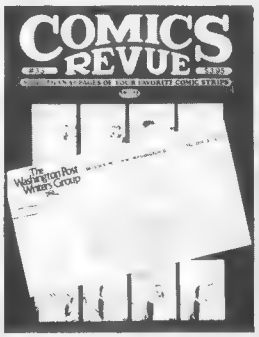
#33 Popeye, Modesty Blaise, Flash Gordon, Bloom County, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, The Phantom, Gasoline Alley *COVER: BOBBY LONDON*



#34 The Phantom, Bloom County, Modesty Blaise, Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon, Popeye, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley, The Wallet Family Tree

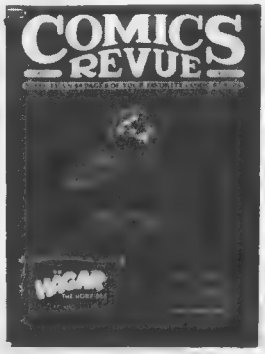
#35 Gasoline Alley, Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible Modesty Blaise Latigo, Popeye, The Phantom, Bloom County, Steve Canyon. *COVER: WALT*





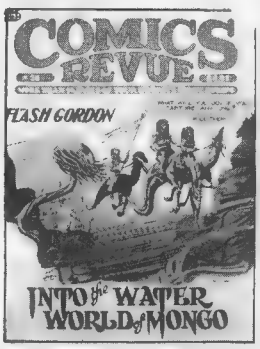
#36 Bloom County, The Phantom, Beetle Bailey, Popeye, Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon

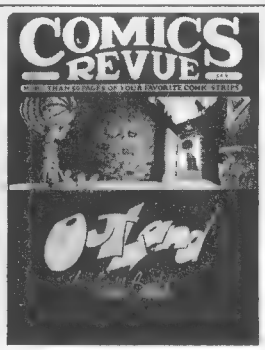
#37 Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon, The Phantom, Latigo Blondie Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley



#38 Hagar the Horrible, The Phantom, Bloom County, Steve Canyon *COVER: WALT*

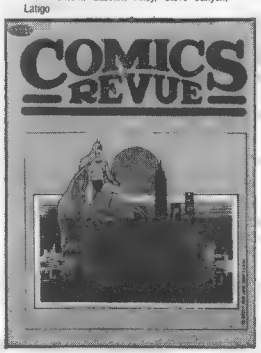
#39 Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible, Latigo, Popeye, Steve Canyon Bloom County, Gasoline Alley

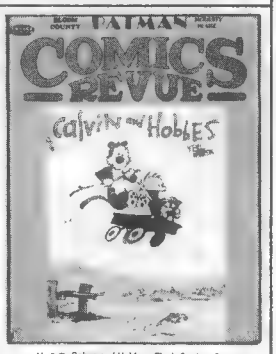




#40 Outland. Latigo, Hagar the Horrible, The Phantom, Gasoline Alley, Steve Canyon Bloom County, Flash Gordon, Modesty Blaise

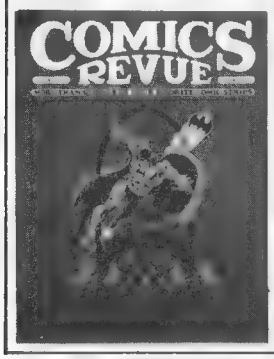
#41 Batman, Outland, Modesty Blaise, Bloom County, Flash Gordon Hagar the Horrible, The Phantom, Gasoline Alley, Steve Canyon, Latigo

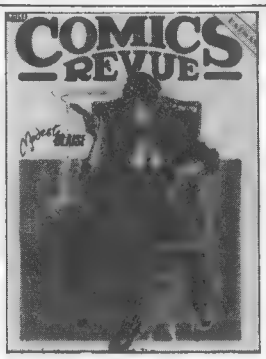




#42 Calvin and Hobbes, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley, Modesty Blaise, Outland, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, The Phantom, Bloom County, Batman

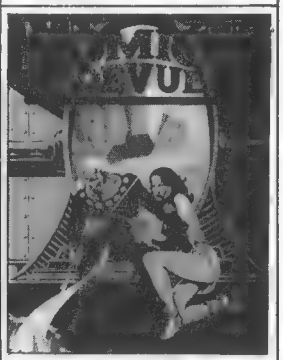
#43 Batman, Bloom County, The Phantom, Hagar the Horrible, Latigo, Gasoline Alley, Flash Gordon, Outland, Steve Canyon, Calvin and Hobbes





#44 Modesty Blaise Gasoline Aley Canyon, Hagar, Flash Gordon, Calvin and Hobbes, The Phantom, Outland, Latigo, Bloom County, Batman *COVER: TED BOONTHANAKIT*

#45 Batman, Outland, The Phantom Hagar the Horrible, Blondie, Flash Gordon Gasoline Alley, Steve Canyon, Bloom County, Latigo, Calvin and Hobbes, Modesty Blaise



#46 Flash Gordon Modesty Blaise Bloom County, Latige, The Phantom, Calvin and Hobbes, Steve Canyon, Batman, Gasoline Alley *COVER BY TOM YEATES*

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The States: "It's eerie not to see THE PHANTOM."

ing Joe train but they didn't like each other. Great stuff.

PAUL: *And they end up fighting in the hospital because they like the same full-figured nurse.*

JIM: That's right, yeah. I don't have a great collection of comic books other than MANDRAKE and THE PHANTOM, but every now and then I stumble upon things like that and I can't resist it. In fact, my wife said, "You are never ever to go into a comic-book shop again." I'd come home with stuff I didn't really want. *(Laughter.)*

TAD: *Haven't we all heard that story before!*

JIM: We must *have* it! *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *Here's the other thing. I always knew that THE PHANTOM was such a phenomenon here, and Lee Falk in interviews would nearly always mention about how popular THE PHANTOM is here, and I think for the first time — I think it was just kind of like dumb luck that it caught on and passed from father to son — but now you've actually tapped into the market with a genuine love and concern for the character. That's like what Stan Lee did for Marvel Comics.*

JIM: Yes. It was *so* necessary. Originally we were *not* communicating with the market. Now we are. The phenomenon, it's incredible. The champion New Zealand galloper called The Phantom — I spoke to the trainer and he's a Phantom buff. The *only* reason he called it The Phantom was because he loves the comic-strip character. There was a horse that ran in Sydney named Phantom's Hero — isn't that clever!

TAD: *It's amazing the number of horses and dogs that are named after comic-book characters. I believe there's another horse going around called Mr. Walker.*

JIM: Yes. *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *George Miller of MAD MAX fame is a big Phantom fan. That's why he paid homage to The Phantom, because in a sense the person that was coming to save everybody, Mad Max, was their*

Classic Falk & Barry PHANTOM (as reprinted in COMICS REVUE — available every month and in back issues — see ads.)

PHANTOM..EASTERN DARK AT JANORRA.. HELP..
HE RACES PAST THE GREAT PEAK CALLED PHANTOM-HEAD...
PHANTOM.. PHANTOM..
...PAST THE WHISPERING GROVE WHERE WINDS MAKE STRANGE SOUNDS..
HELP.. PHANTOM..
...PAST THE JADE HUT AT THE GOLDEN BEACH OF KEELA-WEE..WHERE SAND IS HALF PURE GOLD..
..THRU DEEP JUNGLE.. WHERE EVEN THE FIERCE PREDATORS AVOID THIS POWERFUL TRIO..
FALK & BARRY 2/18
..INTO THE GATES OF THE GENTLE JANORRA PEOPLE.
WELCOME.. PHAN-TOM.. GHOST WHO WALKS..
KILLED.. BY THE EVIL MEN OF THE EASTERN DARK WHO DESTROY OUR TREE GODS. CAN YOU STOP THEM?
I WILL TRY.
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"George Miller of MAD MAX fame is a Phantom fan."

Adaptation of a Semic (Swedish) story — Feb. 1992 — *after* translation and re-lettering.

version of The Phantom.

TAD: *Ostentatious did "The Phantom Shuffle" some years back.*

JIM: Yeah. There have been many attempts on ABC television to really analyze this character, find out what really makes him tick, with university professors of English, doctors of philosophy, and they really go into depths about this. In fact, they read *much* more into it than is really there, but I don't care because it's great.

TAD: *The bottom line is that it's entertaining. That's the key factor. As long as it's entertaining, people will continue to follow it.*

JIM: Yeah, yeah. I don't really — I have no access to the actual sales figures of SPIDER-MAN, X-MEN, et cetera, but I happen to know they're nowhere near us.

PAUL: *In this country.*

JIM: Yeah. Well, I know the story over there, but it's funny for me to go to the States — which I do every year — for me it's eerie to walk into the comic-book shops and not see anything to do with THE PHANTOM except the odd Sunday reprint. Walk into the shops here and THE PHANTOM is always there.

PAUL: *Well, it used to come out every two weeks.*

JIM: It still does — 26 issues a year with four bigger issues a year, so it's actually 30 a year. The strange thing is that growth now is for the bigger issues, which are more expensive, obviously. I've got quite a few plans for down the street. We're running a competition, round the world tickets for two kids and two adults. I'm not averse to chasing some of the old Charlton material. Remember the old Charlton comic books?

PAUL: *Oh, yeah! I loved what Jim Aparo did.*

JIM: Newton's stuff — he was like Ray Moore in many ways, always the wonderful poses. If the negs still exist, that'd be wonderful!

BACK ISSUES

COMICS REVUE

SINGLE - $5.00
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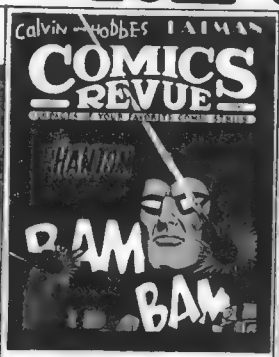
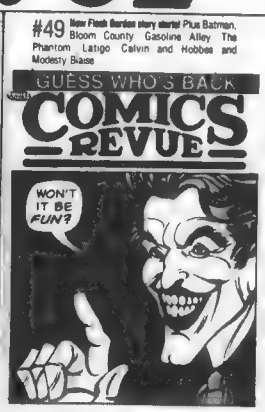
#47 New Modesty Blaise, Gasoline Alley and Steve Canyon begin! Plus Latigo The Phantom, Calvin and Hobbes Outland Flash Gordon, Bloom County and Batman



#48 New Phantom, Latigo and Batman stories begin! Plus Outland, Gasoline Alley, Flash Gordon Calvin and Hobbes, Modesty Blaise and Steve Canyon



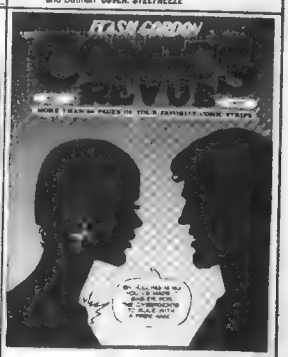
#49 New Flash Gordon story starts! Plus Batman, Bloom County Gasoline Alley The Phantom Latigo Calvin and Hobbes and Modesty Blaise

#50 GREAT ANNIVERSARY ISSUE! New Modesty Blaise, The Phantom, Latigo, Bloom stories begin! Plus Outland Gasoline Alley Flash Gordon and Batman COVER: STELFREEZE

#51 Spider-Man begins in this issue! New Batman story starts! Plus Bloom County Flash Gordon Latigo Outland The Phantom, and Modesty Blaise COVER: TODD McFARLANE

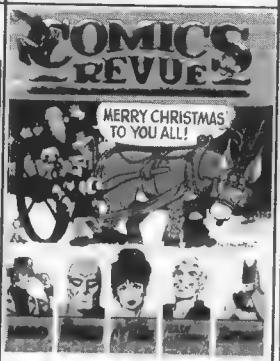
#52 New Flash Gordon and Latigo stories begin! Plus Batman, Bloom County, Amazing Spider-Man, The Phantom and Modesty Blaise COVER: BABY FROLICH

#53 New Batman and Modesty Blaise stories begin! Plus Flash Gordon, The Phantom, Latigo and Amazing Spider-Man



#54 Complete Flash Gordon story! New Latigo and Phantom stories begin! Plus Batman, Amazing Spider-Man and Modesty Blaise

#55 New Amazing Spider-Man and Flash Gordon stories start! Plus Bloom County The Phantom, Latigo, Modesty Blaise and Batman

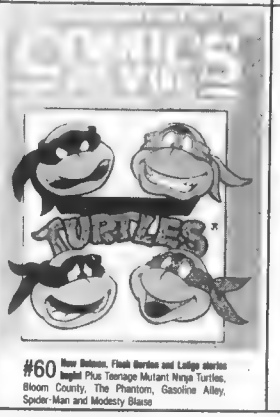


#56 New Batman and Phantom stories begin! Plus Gasoline Alley, Modesty Blaise, Bloom County, Flash Gordon, Spider-Man and Latigo

#57 New Modesty Blaise and Flash Gordon stories begin! Plus Bloom County, The Phantom, Latigo, Spider-Man, Gasoline Alley and Batman COVER: ROMERO

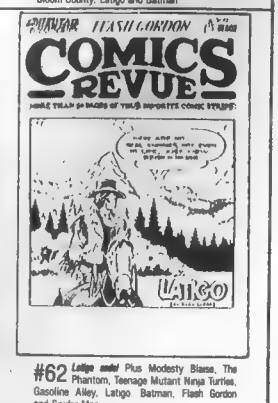
#58 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles begins! Also new stories start in Gasoline Alley and The Phantom. Plus Spider-Man, Modesty Blaise, Flash Gordon, Bloom County, Latigo and Batman

#59 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Batman, Bloom County, The Phantom, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley, Modesty Blaise and Latigo COVER: TODD McFARLANE



#60 New Batman, Flash Gordon and Latigo stories begin! Plus Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Bloom County, The Phantom, Gasoline Alley, Spider-Man and Modesty Blaise

#61 Bloom County ends! New Modesty Blaise, Phantom and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles stories start! Plus Gasoline Alley Latigo Batman, Flash Gordon and Spider-Man



#62 Latigo ends! Plus Modesty Blaise, The Phantom, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Gasoline Alley, Latigo Batman, Flash Gordon and Spider-Man

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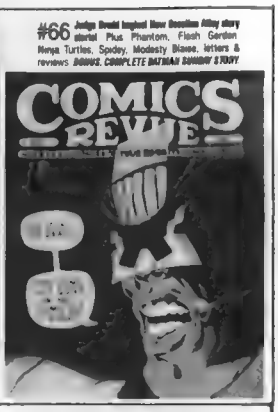
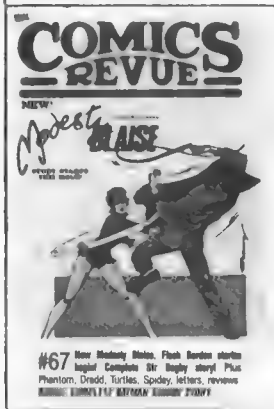
#63 New Batman story begins! Complete Phantom story in this issue! Plus Spider-Man, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Flash Gordon, Modesty Blaise, book reviews & letters!

#64 New Modesty Blaise, Phantom & Gasoline Alley stories start! Complete Jeff Hawke story in this issue! Plus Flash Gordon, Spider-Man, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles & Batman!

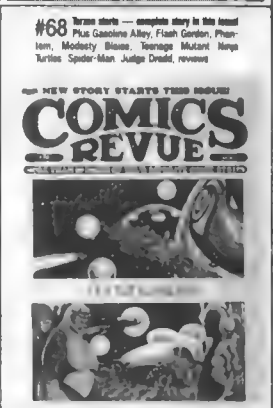
#65 Batman meets Ninja Turtles story starts! Plus Modesty Blaise, Gasoline Alley, Flash Gordon, Phantom, Spider-Man, Bloom County Extra, reviews & letters. COVER: ED HANNIGAN.



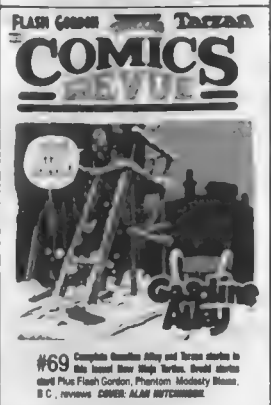
#66 Judge Dredd begins! New Gasoline Alley story starts! Plus Phantom, Flash Gordon, Ninja Turtles, Spidey, Modesty Blaise, letters & reviews. BONUS: COMPLETE BATMAN SUNDAY STORY



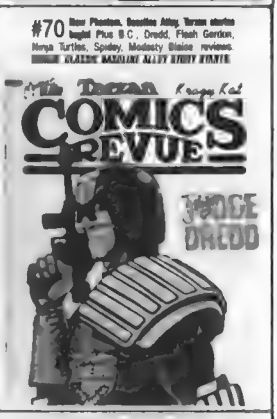
#67 New Modesty Blaise, Flash Gordon stories begin! Complete Sir Scrip story! Plus Phantom, Dredd, Turtles, Spidey, letters, reviews



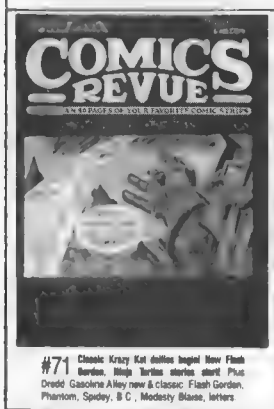
#68 Tarzan starts — complete story in this issue! Plus Gasoline Alley, Flash Gordon, Phantom, Modesty Blaise, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Spider-Man, Judge Dredd, reviews



#69 Complete Gasoline Alley and Tarzan stories in this issue! New Ninja Turtles, Dredd stories start! Plus Flash Gordon, Phantom, Modesty Blaise, B.C., reviews. COVER: ALAN HUTCHINSON.

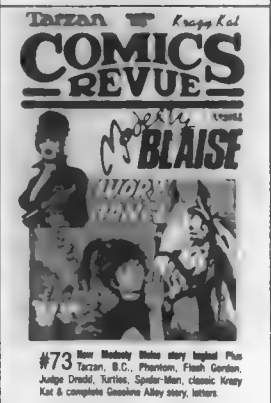


#70 New Phantom, Gasoline Alley, Tarzan stories begin! Plus B.C., Dredd, Flash Gordon, Ninja Turtles, Spidey, Modesty Blaise reviews. BONUS: BLAISE/GASOLINE ALLEY STORY STARTS



#71 Classic Krazy Kat dailies begin! New Flash Gordon, Ninja Turtles stories start! Plus Dredd, Gasoline Alley new & classic, Flash Gordon, Phantom, Spidey, B.C., Modesty Blaise, letters

#72 New Tarzan story begins! Plus Spider-Man, Modesty Blaise, B.C., Flash Gordon, Phantom, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Judge Dredd, classic Gasoline Alley & Krazy Kat, reviews.

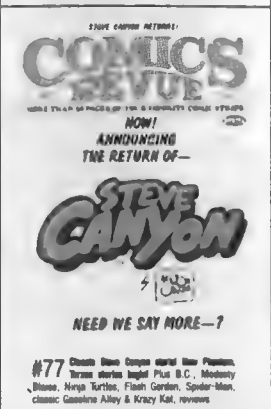


#73 New Modesty Blaise story begins! Plus Tarzan, B.C., Phantom, Flash Gordon, Judge Dredd, Turtles, Spider-Man, classic Krazy Kat & complete Gasoline Alley story, letters.

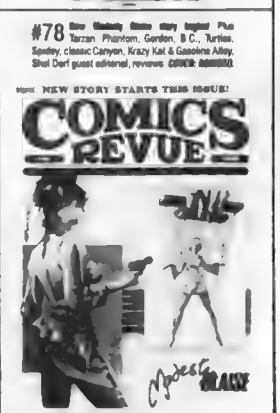
#74 New Phantom, Tarzan, classic Gasoline Alley stories start! Plus B.C., Flash Gordon, Spider-Man, Judge Dredd, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Modesty Blaise, classic Krazy Kat, letters

#75 Phantom, B.C., Modesty Blaise, Flash Gordon, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Spider-Man, Tarzan, classic Gasoline Alley & Krazy Kat, reviews. COVER: ROMANO MOLENAAR.

#76 New Spider-Man/Dr. Strange, new Flash Gordon stories start! Plus Modesty Blaise, Phantom, B.C., Tarzan, Turtles, classic Gasoline Alley, Krazy Kat. BONUS: ORIGIN OF SPIDEY!



#77 Classic Steve Canyon story! New Phantom, Tarzan stories begin! Plus B.C., Modesty Blaise, Ninja Turtles, Flash Gordon, Spider-Man, classic Gasoline Alley & Krazy Kat, reviews



#78 New Modesty Blaise story begins! Plus Tarzan, Phantom, Gordon, B.C., Turtles, Spidey, classic Canyon, Krazy Kat & Gasoline Alley. Shel Dorf guest editorial, reviews. COVER: ROMANO

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"You had three choices if you wanted to write comics. Be a whore, a mechanic or a magician."

DON McGREGOR

CREEPY #143 art ©1982 Warren Publishing Inc. "Blond Guy" ©1981 McGregor & Graham. Morbius, Black Panther, Killraven and War of the Worlds art ©1973 Marvel Comics Group. Lady Rawhide ©1995 Zorro Productions. DETECTIVES, INC. ©1987 McGregor & Colan. Sabre ©1983 McGregor & Williams

In last month's installment of this interview, we followed Don in his first faltering steps down the road to sin, degradation and comics writing. Now, showing no mercy, we extract from him the confession of his doings at Warren and Marvel in the '70s, and (reaching for a hot poker) we will force him to spill the beans on SABRE, the 1977 Eclipse project that helped establish the alternative comics market.

Join us now, as we enter Part Three of this, the Don McGregor Interview That Would Not Die . . .

"Over the years I've found ways to make the

LOU MOUGIN: *I have to tell you, when I printed out the last page of the first part of your interview to send to you, Don, I had to buy another industrial-sized box of computer paper for this session.*

DON McGREGOR: *(Laughter.)* And I've just run out of typing paper that I use as overlays on the original-sized xeroxes of comic art. I was taping the last sheet of tracing paper over **Mike Mayhew** Lady Rawhide art when the phone rang and I realized I don't have any more in the house, and I have the entire Bond 3: "The Quasimodo Gambit" book to place copy on. That book is going to be a nightmare since some pages are scarcely sketched and have what are little more than stick figures with letters (sometimes, if I'm lucky) to tell me what characters are in a panel.

LOU: *So that's how you do your word balloons, huh? You just do them on tracing paper?*

DON: I'm not sure "just do" them is the way I'd phrase it. Over the years it seems as if I've found ways to make the whole process of producing a comic more time consuming and more work. *(Laughter.)* Most people do it the other way around over the years. The say "Oh! Here's an easier, quicker way to do this!" *(Laughter.)*

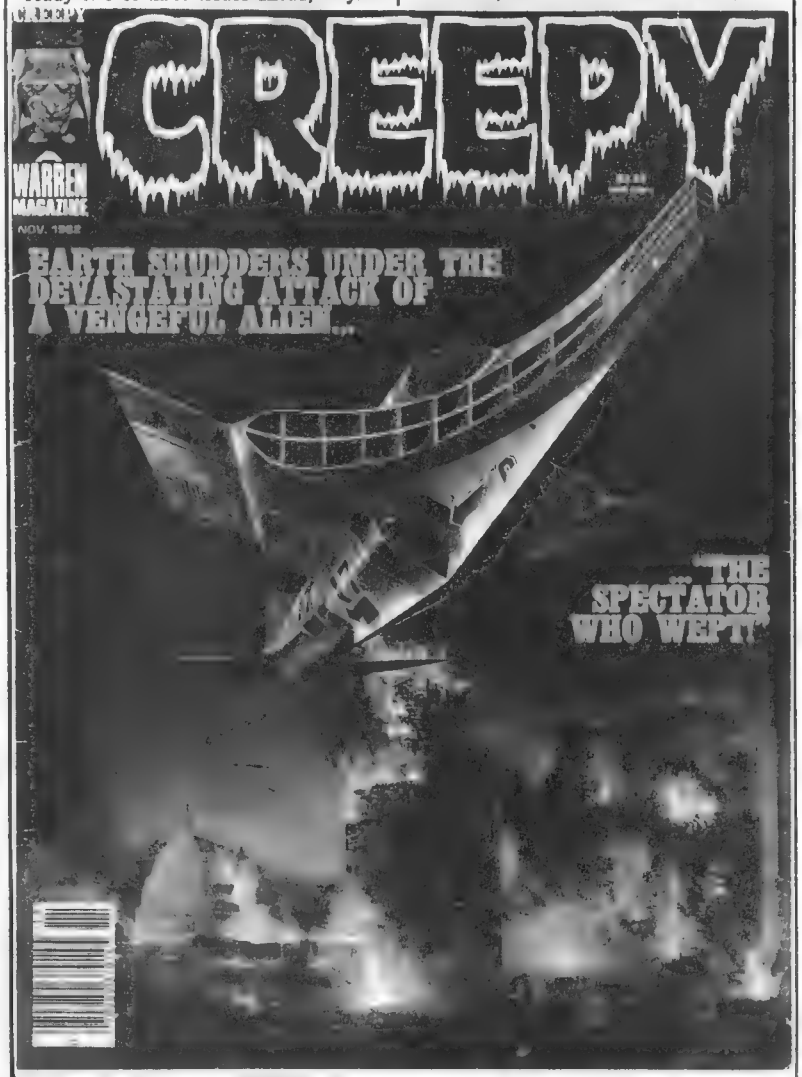
This isn't a complaint, by the way, because I much prefer having the chance to hand-letter the entire story, rather than trying to guess, perhaps optimistically, how much room the copy is going to take. Once it's lettered, it is now an easy process to have the art shot down to comic-book size, which you can keep for easy reference as the book goes through various stages of completion. It makes it easier for me to discuss the book with the artist or the editor if a question arises some time later. You also have the opportunity to gauge how the reduction affects the way the eye sees the copy.

When I was first writing comics, you never had the opportunity to see what the book would more-or-less look like until it was a finished, coverless copy called a make-ready, and when it was at that stage it was too damn late to change anything. You had one pitch of the ball, one swing of the bat, and you had to hope everything was going to connect. Doing it this way, you can get a pretty accurate feel of how this is going to read.

LOU: *I guess that's true if you're scripting it Marvel style. If you have to do things full-script, the whole thing can be out of your hands and done before you ever see it.*

DON: Well, even when I'm doing a full-script, even after I've taken the effort to bring it that far, the book remains very organic for me, which means that final copy can change right at the moment I'm working over the (usually) finished art. A lot of the time the art will inspire a new way of looking at the scene, bring a particular phrase or choice of words that integrate the whole as if they were planned from the very beginning. The great thing about being able to have a xeroxed copy of the book in front of you after it goes off for lettering, inking and coloring, it that if you have to confer with the rest of the talent involved in making this the best damn comic you can, you have easy reference to text and art. On a monthly book like ZORRO, you're already two or three issues ahead, maybe more, as the other issues are reaching completion.

It can get confusing real easy. Let's say I'm writing ZORRO #11, and Mike is pencilling ZORRO #8, and **Dwight Zimmerman** or Mike call with a question about one of those earlier issues, well, I'm pretty well locked into ZORRO #11 at that point, and what I need to bring that story together, and if you have that material handy it's a lot easier to bring into focus what they're asking you about. It's easy to overlook something when you're keeping track on different issues, because my involvement with a book doesn't end for me when I pull out the last sheet of paper from the typewriter, it stays alive and passionate to the end. I try to keep on top of what needs to be corrected, what can be made better, be



Cover painting by Tony Roberts for Don's story, "The Spectator Who Wept." This issue also featured McGregor's "Moral Blood," part two.

process of producing a comic more work."

there not only for Mike, but also the letterer or the colorist.

LOU: *I want to do a short bit here on some of your Warren stuff before we get on to your Marvel work. I've read the Warren stories and like them quite a bit. A lot of them featured two male leads, one white and one black. Was this like casting yourself and Alex Simmons as the leads in these stories?*

DON: Okay, just back up a minute. Which story are we talking about?

LOU: *Several of them. I'm thinking of a vampire story in which you had two college guys, one of them a white fellow and the other a black man, who, I think, worked in the student counseling part of the college (CREEPY #57: "An Excuse For Violence"). Then there was a Phantom of the Opera-type story, in which you had a white and black detective team working on this murder which took place in a movie house (CREEPY #59: "A Dark and Violent Place") . . .*

DON: I only have vague recollections of that stuff!

LOU: *(Laughter) Yeah, I know, it was seven jillion years ago.*

DON: I don't know. I suspect the characters in those stories are different from one another. I'm sure they are not based on Alex and me.

LOU: *Maybe it's just like I SPY, I don't know.* (Laughter.)

DON: Well, certainly, I SPY is a heavy influence on me. I mean, when I first saw **Culp** and **Cosby,** I guess the only way I can describe this as a kind of instant love, man, they knocked me out. I was just taken with the friendship and camaraderie they had, that chemistry between them. I think that's something that television does extremely well, and perhaps never better that **Culp** and **Cosby** together during the years of I SPY. I've never been much of a joiner, my close attachments are to my family and personal friends whom I never get to see enough of, but care about keeping. I could really identify with that, in the way Bob and Bill were together. There was a wonderful give and take there, there was a kind of love for each other that really came across on the screen. Great show. It influenced me profoundly, there's no doubt about that.

I don't know if those particular stories were influenced by I SPY. I doubt it, because the storylines you're describing, if I remember correctly, I don't think they were the "hip" kind of characters that Bill and Bob played in I SPY. But I want to say that I had a chance to meet **Bob Culp** in ensuing years. In fact, I interviewed him

WHAT'S the LITTLE BLOND-HAIRED GUY'S DOING HERE?
HEY, MAN! IT'S FOUR O'CLOCK SUNDAY MORNING -- NOTHING'S OPEN AT THIS TIME WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU TAKING ME?
MAYBE EVERYTHING CLOSES UP BY NINE SHARP WITH LIGHTS OUT BY TEN IN THE BOONDOCKS WHERE YOU COME FROM... BUT THAT'S NOT THE WAY IT IS IN HARLEM
YOU KNOW, THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'VE BEEN IN HARLEM I MEAN, EVEN AT FOUR IN THE MORNING, THERE'S STILL FOLKS WANDERING ABOUT BUT.. TONIGHT IT'S COLDER'N A WITCH'S TIT AND MOST FOLKS HAVE SENSE ENOUGH TO BE IN BED!
I'VE THE VALLEY OF DEATH RODE THE 600.. OR MAYBE THERE WERE ONLY TWO AND MAYBE THEY WERE ONLY WALKING

Speaking of casting, this looks suspiciously like artist Billy Graham and writer Don McGregor, from ECLIPSE magazine, issue #2.

for STARLOG magazine. That was the only time I was nervous about doing an interview. *(Laughter.)* My wife said, "I've never seen you so nervous! He's not the president!" I said, "I wouldn't be nervous if it was the president of the United States — but **Robert Culp,** he's one of my heroes! Like **Bill Cosby!** Wow!" *(Laughter.)* In other interviews, I never had notes, I would just do them. With **Culp,** I had all kinds of notes and didn't need them. He's a marvelous storyteller, a wonderful man, full of energy and enthusiasm. He still is. One can't underestimate his ability, not just as an actor but as a writer, and as a director. He's multi-talented. I don't know how the guy can do all the things he has done.

LOU: *Just lucky, I guess.(Laughter)*

DON: It's more than that, Lou. It's talent and hard work and commitment. His I SPY scripts are the best I SPY episodes. Everybody kind of remembers I SPY as being the show that was about this give and take between the two of them. But there were many serious episodes. And it was one of the first shows on American TV to oftentimes really question the government's edicts. Kelly and Scotty quite often challenged their superiors, *(Laughter),* and disobeyed and/or were used by the government. That facet is often forgotten. In fact, when the people did the RETURN OF I SPY movie last year, they had Kelly as a bureaucrat. Could never happen. Not with that character. First of all, the government would never have allowed it. Kelly was way too disobedient. *(Laughter.)*

It was really odd, because Bob was working on a big screen version of I SPY before that. The plotting that he had for that certainly was more in keeping with the way Kelly would have been. I don't think the writers that wrote the Return movie really understood the characters. But at least the byplay was there.

And, hey, if anybody has a complete video-taped of **Culp's** I SPY episode "Home to Judgement" contact me at

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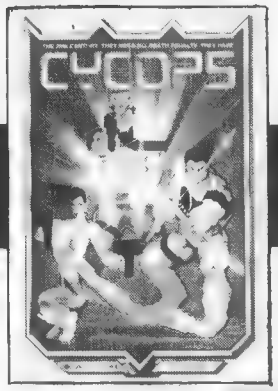

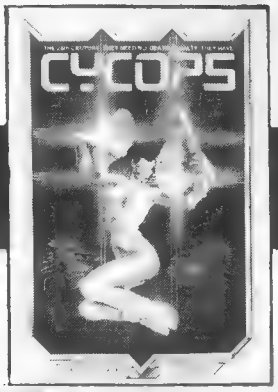

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"I SPY is a heavy influence on me."

Topps. It's a powerful and exciting hour of television but the copy I have came off the Family Channel, and they butchered it, cutting out five minutes! Along those lines, if anyone has a copy of the 77 SUNSET STRIP episode: "Reserved for Mr. Bailey," written and directed by **Montgomery Pitman,** please, please drop me a line and let me know.

LOU: *I'm not going to dwell too long on the Warrens, because we're talking about stories you did twenty years ago and I'm sure they're only vague memories by now. Twenty years! Lord, doesn't that make you feel old?*

DON: Doesn't make me feel old at all. Don't particularly remember the stories, though! *(Laughter.)* I'm in the midst of doing Lady Rawhide, and I'm about to go back to doing Zorro. So my concentration is on that, and those Warren stories I haven't picked up and reread in a long time. Some of them I remember better than others, I'm sure. I vaguely remember the stories you were talking about. The one on the college campus is pretty early Warren, but I have difficulty recalling when the other was written. I have the impression it was later.

LOU: *Well, there was a trilogy I remember featuring the cop character, David Turner, who first appeared in "A Tangible Hatred" (CREEPY #41), that one that Rich Corben drew. The other two stories in the David Turner trilogy are "The Night the Snow Spilled Blood" (EERIE #38) and "Not a Creature Was Stirring" (CREEPY #59).*

DON: Exactly.

LOU: *And the other two were Christmas stories draw by Tom Sutton.*

DON: Right. I think there was a kind of vague idea in my head to do one of those David Turner cop-stories a year. It was the kind of thing that was floating around in the back of my head. At one point, Warren was going to do a special **Don McGregor** kind of issue. And I was going to do a thing which was a "Vampire Tree" kind of anthology. The book had to have some cohesive theme besides just having me write it. And I think they were going to do similar things with other writers, as well. So I had come up with the idea of doing chronologically-related vampire tales. The first one would start back perhaps as far as prehistoric times, and then would lead on up from there.

One of those, and we're talking way on back there, 1970, '71 somewhere, is what became "Moral Blood and Soiled Doves." Maybe, in the book, they just called it "Moral Blood." (CREEPY #142-144).

LOU: *That's a Sidewinder story. The other Sidewinder story is "This Graveyard is Not Deserted" (CREEPY #54).*

DON: Yeah. But that story, with the Sidewinder character, was actually conceived back then as part of that. Then the next one was what became the Hodiah Twist story . . .

LOU: *Oh, yeah, the one in VAMPIRE TALES #2, "The Praying Mantis Principle."*

DON: Yeah, the one where all the hookers are vampires.

LOU: *That was funny.*

DON: And all those stories were hooked into that cycle, going historically onward and upward. *(Laughter.)* So eventually, they all got done in one form or another. Or many of them did, at any rate.

LOU: *If they didn't get done for Warren, they did for Marvel.*

DON: Right.

LOU: *That brings us to the point where you left Warren and started working for Marvel. I don't know if you just quit one and went to work for the other, or if it was a gradual supplanting. How did you come to work for Marvel?*

DON: Well, I wrote a lot of letters to the comics and everything. And certainly that's a way to let the folks at the comics know who you are. I got a call from an editor at Marvel who asked me if I wanted to submit some sample pages of scripts over artwork. They sent me some **Gene Colan** Daredevil material as a matter of fact.

LOU: *Neat.*

Also from VAMPIRE TALES #2: Snappy Rich Buckler splash for Don's Morbius series.

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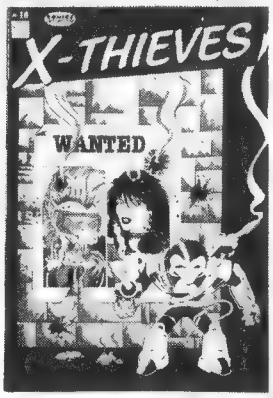

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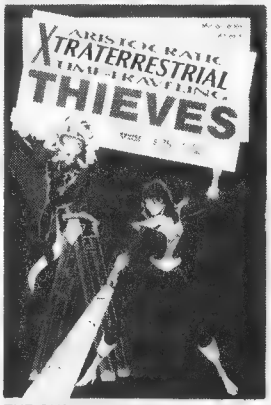

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"Warren was going to do a special Don McGregor issue."

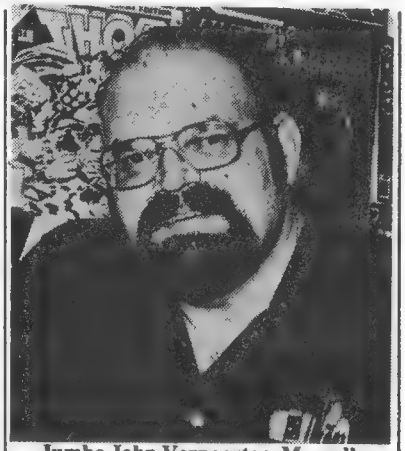
DON: At that point, of course, I hadn't met or worked with **Gene Colan.** But anyway, they sent me that stuff, and I was still living up in the state of Rhode Island at the time. They were beginning to expand their line of books, and they wanted some assistant editors. Really, what they wanted was more like gofers. *(Laughter.)* So I was coming down to proofread books. Mostly, that's what I was doing.

The first people I really remember meeting when I started working at Marvel are **John Verpoorten,** who was their production manager, and **Danny Crespi,** who was the head of the lettering department and corrections. Marvel was much smaller in those days than it is now. And both Danny and John were just great to me. But the first time I ever met John — if you've never met **John Verpoorten,** he was a huge man.

LOU: *I've heard the legends.*

DON: When he entered the doorway, he would just fill it. You didn't see the space around his body. *(Laughter.)* It was **John Verpoorten's** responsibility to get those books out on time. And when I was writing books for Marvel Comics, for me it was never the company. I was always doing this work for John. And I didn't really want to cause John any problems. So if I could get pages in to John, I would try everything in the world to get those pages written for him. *(Laughter.)*

But the first time I ever met John. I didn't know him, and he just came in the doorway. And I was proofreading a book, and had all the full-sized artwork in my



Jumbo John Verpoorten, Marvel's much-missed mid-'70s production manager.

lap or whatever, and was going over it with a pencil. I heard John shout out, **"McGregor,** where's that book? GAHH!" The pages just fell out of my lap on the floor, and I said, "John! I'm working on it! I'm working on it!" *(Laughter.)*

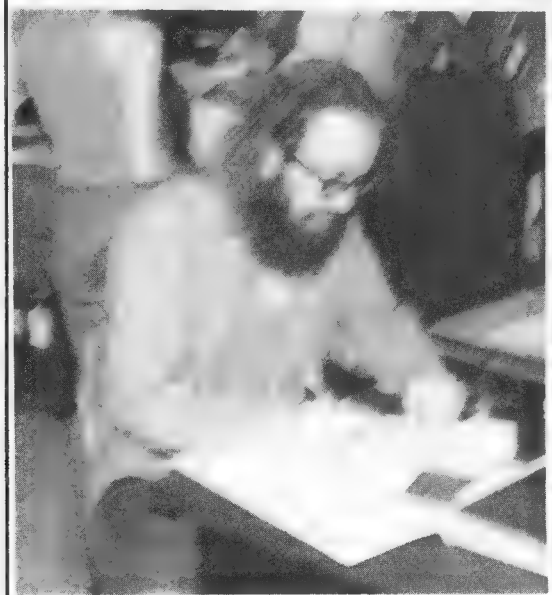
They were incredibly supportive. I think they thought, "Hey this business is gonna eat this kid alive and spit him out." (Laughter) Danny and John both kinda took me under their wings. But I can remember John, whenever I was working on the Black Panther and Killraven books, and we would always be in some kind of crucial deadline period for those books to get out on time. Of course, if you were a writer or artist working on staff and you were there, you were a lot easier to get than the freelancers who were not there. Because they can hunt you down, and physically you're right there, and they can see you! I would always hear John coming down the hall, and I would hide under the desk. *(Laughter.)* John would come down and say, "Ya seen Don? Is Don around here?" I'd be hiding underneath the desk and DAK would be at his desk beside mine, acting nonchalant, while I'm going, "Come on, John, don't look down here. Please don't see me." *(Laughter.)*

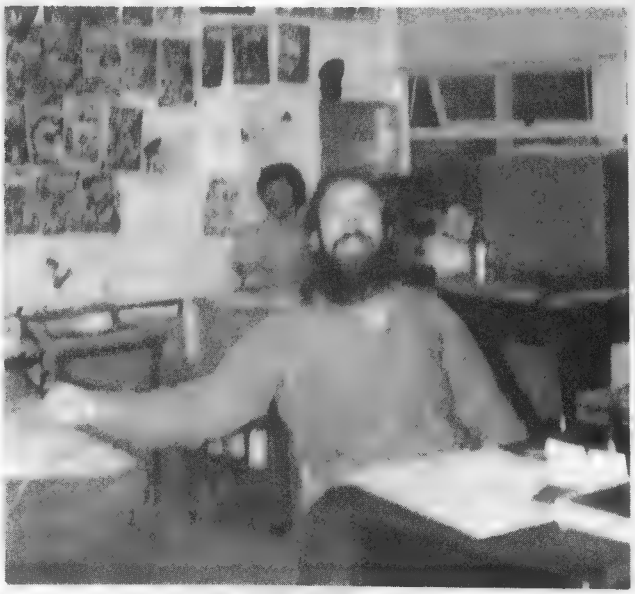
So one day, finally, John came walking down, came in the door, and went, "Where's Don?" (*Laughter.)* And I was underneath the desk. So I came up and said, "John, you know I don't have the pages, 'cause if I had the pages I would be so happy. I would be running down the hall to your office going, 'John! Look! I got PAGES for you!!'" I said, "I'm getting too old to hide underneath this desk anymore, John!"

LOU: (Laughter.) *Oh, jeez!*

DON: But he was wonderful. And my wife, Marsha, and I were supposed to go over to John's apartment one night . . . John was a film collector, and we were supposed to go over and watch some films together. Marsha was going to make dinner for us all. I don't remember what to this day, but something came up and I couldn't make it. Lou, and I . . . you know, I had to call John and cancel. I said, "But we'll do it soon, John. Very soon."

And I came into the office after the weekend . . . and, um, somebody told me that **John Verpoorten** was dead.





DAK at work in the Marvel Bullpen, 1974, at the self-same desk adjacent to Don's (that's Marv Wolfman back in the corner). My, how Marvel has changed since those golden days!

"I was no political threat. I wasn't angling for editor-

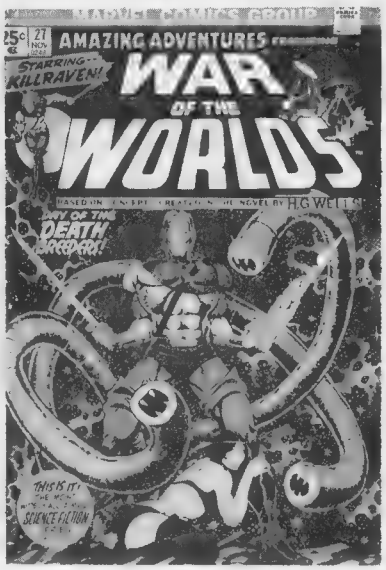
I immediately got angry. I thought it was just a sick joke that somebody was playing. And I turned around and said something really angry. And John's office had partitioning partway up, and the rest was glass; you could see into the office where he was. And I suddenly knew that somehow it was true. And to this day, one of the things that I regret is that I didn't get over there and see him. I really enjoyed being with John. He was, he *was*, Marvel Comics. He was the guy who literally got those books out. And he also really cared about a lot of the people who were working for him.

LOU: *Including you, I'm sure.*

DON: Yes. If he knew he could trust you, and you needed to put in a voucher or something, John would make sure that you didn't get stuck. He was always there for you. I can't tell you how much he and **Danny Crespi** did for me. They were a real support system for me when I first went into that place. Because there were few people you could trust the way you could trust those two men. They gave their word and then kept it. And they weren't angling for anything, trying to get books, or trying to get you to do this or that. They had no axe to grind. I miss both of them dearly.

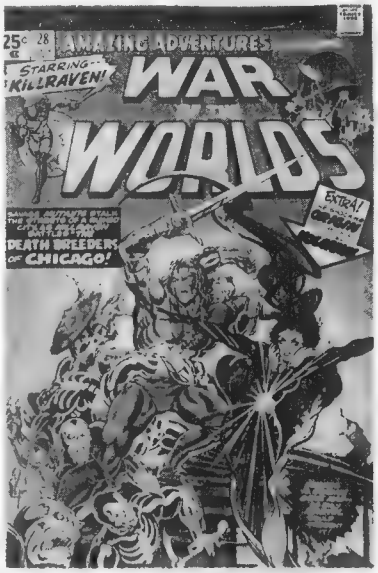
LOU: *Let's segue into the four series that you wrote for Marvel, KILLRAVEN, the BLACK PANTHER, LUKE CAGE, and MORBIUS. My favorite, of course, was KILLRAVEN in AMAZING ADVENTURES. And you were the fourth writer on that, in as many issues. Can you tell me how you got handed the palm for that one?*

DON: *(Laughter.)* When Killraven was first being worked on, before the first story was published in AMAZING ADVENTURES #18, I think they had high hopes for it. They had a lot of high profile talent on it.



LOU: *Neal Adams, yeah. And Roy Thomas.*

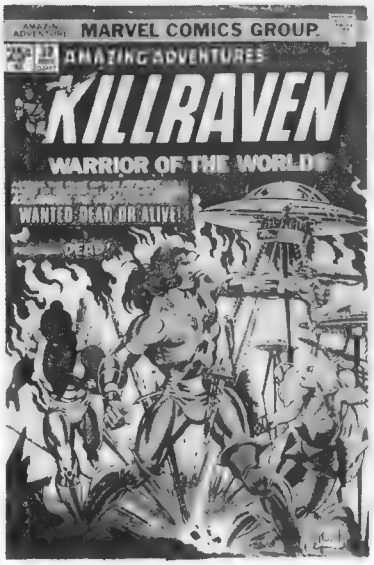
DON: And it became obvious that they could not keep that team on it, that it was not gonna happen on a bimonthly basis. So they kept shifting talent. After three shifts in talent in as many issues, I think that it was a book that Marvel had given up on. Years later, I was told that they had put me on books like the Black Panther in JUNGLE ACTION and Killraven because they felt that they were jungle-genre books and science fiction genre books, and those didn't tend to sell well in comics. There was no reason for this person to lie about this or make it up. He



was told this personally, that they kinda wanted me to stay on the editorial side of things, not that I was particularly good at that, but I was willing to stay there nights *(Laughter)* and be up till two, and I was no political threat. I wasn't angling for editor-in-chief, or anything like that. You know, in that sense, they liked that more than they liked the writing. Thank God for the readers, because the readers were very, very supportive.

LOU: *Yeah, that's true.*

DON: And you know, God, if it hadn't been for them, I would have been getting my head handed to me left and right without any kind of support. Fortunately, the readers came to me like gangbusters. And the books survived long beyond what anybody thought they would ever manage.



That's the same reason artist **Craig Russell** was put on Killraven at the time. Craig and I had done very few books. And Craig was on somebody's bad list, too. He'd done an interview somewhere in which he had said something about Marvel changing some of his artwork, or something like that. And in those days, there were a lot less fanzines. There was a lot less of this stuff where people are complaining about things, getting out there to the public at large. So I don't think he was on anybody's "great" list. But within two or three issues of his Killraven, everybody was after him to draw their book. "What are you stickin' on that Killraven book for? Why don't you come over here and draw this book?" And Craig was really great. We stayed together, we were partners all the time, and it was wonderful workin' with him. He just . . . that's one of those experiences where you can see an artist grow from book to book. It just amazed you with what he was going to come up with next, and how he was going to handle scenes and characters when you wrote the script and handed it in to him.

Even though at times I would drop by and see Craig while he was working, I was still staggered by what he would do when the finished artwork would finally come in. I would see it and go, "Oh, my God! Look at this! This is beautiful!"

LOU: *Right.*

DON: So it was a tremendous experience to be working with someone as talented as him. Same thing with **Billy Graham.** Those books were published by Marvel, but they were kinda done outside of Marvel. It was just Billy and I doing the Panther, and it was Craig and I doing

in-chief. They liked that more than the writing."

Killraven. We were left more-or-less to our own devices.

I was called on the carpet time after time after time, but the books were already out there, and I would go, "Well, that's six months ago! Now I'm doing this!" *(Laughter.)* That was before they had all the checks and balances, trying to weed out any creativity.

LOU: (Laughter.) *Yeah, right. That's one of the things that did get me later, around the time that everything collapsed. It seemed like Marvel just lost a humongous load of talent, yourself included, but also Craig, Steve Englehart, Starlin, Paul Gulacy, and a whole bunch of others. Even Steve Gerber lost all but HOWARD THE DUCK, and a couple of years later he even lost that. What was the impetus for all that? What caused it? I was never able to figure it out.*

DON: *(Knowing laughter.)* Well, there were changes in the regime so many times, there was so much political stuff going on at Marvel at that particular point in time, that trying to keep your head above water was like when the Nautilus was going under. It was a struggle just to do that! *(Laughter.)*

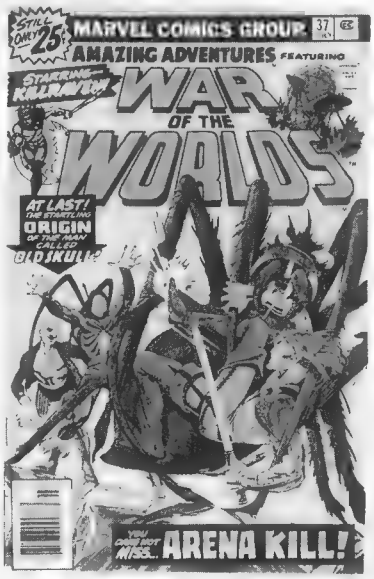
I think a lot of creative people were feeling the pressure put on them. There were things they wanted to do with books, and either they weren't being allowed to do them, or they were being censured, and . . . a *lot* of stuff was going on. But at that time, it was like, if you weren't doing books for either Marvel or DC . . . it isn't like it is now. There weren't a lot of companies to go to.

LOU: *No, there weren't.*

DON: And when I first had the idea to do SABRE — and I'm not going to remember all the permutations on this, but here's one I've even forgotten — at one point, **Jim Salicrup** was going to do a biweekly newspaper. SABRE was originally created for *that.* Jim asked me if I would do a strip. He was working with **David Anthony Kraft,** who was living in New York City at the time, and they had a studio called Mad Genius Associates. They had office space in the same building that **Paddy Chayefsky** was in. We used to ride the elevator with Paddy. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *Ever give him any of your comics?*

DON: *(Gasp)* No! But after I saw a screening of NETWORK, oh, man, that was symptomatic of everything that was going on in the media, comics included. A lot of the other comics folk didn't have the same sense of outrage about it, certainly, that I felt about it.


MARVEL COMICS GROUP
AMAZING ADVENTURES
WAR OF THE WORLDS
AT LAST! THE STIRRING ORIGIN OF THE MAN CALLED BLOODSKULL!
ARENA KILL!

But anyway, when we were first taking SABRE around, and trying to find a place where we could have that character appear in a book, I remember people saying things like, "Don, who's gonna buy a book about a black guy with a lot of guns?" *(Laughter.)* And **Dean Mullaney** told me that **Phil Seuling,** who was one of the biggest distributors in the New York City area at the time, said to him, "Dean, who's gonna buy a comic book for six bucks?" At that time, it was virtually unheard of.

I don't know whether SABRE's the first independent American graphic novel. Some people have called it that, but I'm not sure, because I'm not aware of everything else that was out there. But we were one of the first. Sabre was designed to be a character we could take and publish more stories about. I don't mean sequels, just stories that would follow that character's life. I always thought of Sabre — and this will startle and astound some people — kind of as my version of Prince Valiant. It's a love story. Beyond everything, beyond whatever else is going on in their world, it's a love story between a man and a woman.

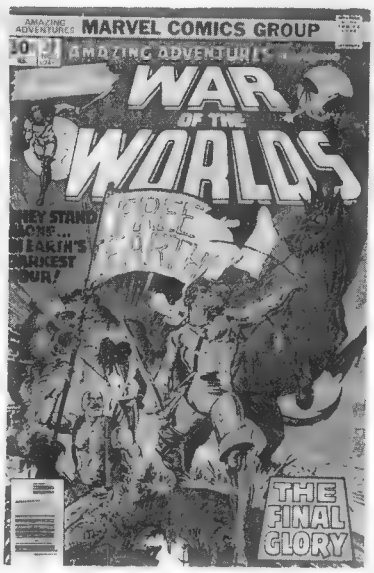
Obviously, we got into a lot of other things in that book that I could never have done at Marvel Comics. But I said to **Dean Mullaney,** "If I'm gonna do something for you guys in the thing with Eclipse, I have no desire to have all the restrictions put on me that I had when I was doing books for Marvel." But there are still some people who said, "Well, look, Don got the chance to go out and do something different, and he did a superhero character," even though I think we broke almost every rule in terms of what was going on in superhero genre stories and fantasy-type stories of that time.

But I couldn't have come out with DETECTIVES, INC. first. It would just have been suicide to do it. So I did that as the second book for Eclipse. Then I came out with RAGAMUFFINS. But if I had, say, come out with RAGAMUFFINS as the first book out of the gate, I probably wouldn't have had the chance to do a second. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *Well, you usually work in the heroic tradition, and I see nothing wrong with that at all. As a matter of fact, I love it.*

DON: Yeah, I love writing about heroes.

LOU: *Yeah!*



"There was so much politics at Marvel, trying to keep

DON: Some people always say, "Oh, the bad guys are more interesting!" *(Laughter.)* Nonsense! I don't believe that at all. Certainly, writing the villains is interesting. But no more interesting than writing about the heroes. By God, I have to write characters like Zorro and Lady Rawhide again and again, so they better be damn well interesting characters. And just because they're heroes doesn't mean that they can't have human foibles. There are things that they'll handle right, and other situations will just be too much for them. So I never see anything simplistic about writing about heroes. And they're not always heroic, but there are times when they are. They rise to a certain occasion and meet head-on something that can no longer be avoided. Sometimes they want to avoid it.

Sabre, for instance, is not looking for trouble. *(Laughter.)* He never is. But eventually there comes a point where he cannot turn his head and look the other way anymore. Not if he's gonna stay true to himself. You know, it's the opposite of that victim mentality. There's a part of Sabre that says, "I'm not gonna be a victim, and I'm not gonna watch other people be victims anymore," and is willing to stand when the moment of truth really comes and say, "Okay, this is as far as I'll be pushed. This is as far as I'll let you threaten my family or people that I care about and love." And then he stands, and he's willing to take the heat.

But I also have said to my audiences, and I hope it's consistent through my writing, that these things don't come without a price tag. On the other hand, you can lose something very valuable about yourself if you don't stand up for the things that you believe in.

LOU: *Well, of course, there's always the tradition of your heroes taking a hell of a lot of bodily punishment.* (Don laughs.) *Yeah, right, you know what I'm talking about! I'm flashing on Morbius getting dragged through the street with barbed wire wrapped around his neck, or the Panther taking issue after issue of pain, getting dumped into a thorn forest or fighting this guy who's got thorns all over his body . . . you could pick out any of those moments from "Panther's Rage" and know what I'm talking about. Is this part of the heroic ideal, the ordeals your Siegfried-like hero must suffer, or what?*

DON: Hold that thought while I answer the phone.

LOU: *Okay.*

(Long pause while Don answers the phone.)

DON: It was **Mike Mayhew.**

Speaking of Zorro, here's Lady Rawhide, art by Mike Mayhew.

LOU: *Oh!*

DON: He's working diligently upon LADY RAWHIDE even as we speak.

LOU: *Well, tell him next time you talk to him that I like his stuff, too.*

DON: Thank you! He's a good partner to work with.

LOU: *I imagine so. Well, we're back to the heroic ideal . . .*

DON: Oh, you were asking about the physical side. Well, I . . . *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *I really ask some easy questions around here, don't I?* (Laughter.) *We can skip that one if you want to.*

DON: No, I have no problem with that. I just have to think a moment. The problem with interviews of this sort is that you're getting asked a lot of stuff, and certainly you're flashing on the quickest thing that comes into your head.

Obviously, this is a very visual medium. So when you're doing a conflict between opponents, as heroic fiction tends to do, it has always been my feeling that, for anything to be heroic, it just can't be that the man or woman sets out and does this thing. There has to be a sense of transition in terms of the character and who they are and what affects them. At the same time, in terms of the physical effects, it's like, how much can they endure? Part of the appeal of **Ian Fleming's** James Bond, for instance, is that **Fleming** would make the sequences where Bond was being tortured so realistic, Bond's reactions to them so human, that you felt as if you were there with them. I feel that's part of what you're doing with heroic fiction. You're putting these characters under tremendous, terrible situations which they must endure and survive, and, beyond that, be able to come back. So there is that element in at least some of these Panther stories. I don't say that element must be in every story, certainly not, but if you're doing a superhero story, once you make the character too invulnerable to anything, there's no sense of danger or suspense or conflict. You know how it's going to come off.

So part of my job as a storyteller is, hopefully, to get readers so caught up to the situation that's happening that they think, "There's no way for this character, now, to get out of this!" And then, to realistically find a way to take that character out of that situation. But then those characters have to live with the memory of what happened. And I try to keep that alive. You can't go through some of these things, obviously, without it having a tremendous impact on you emotionally, psychologically, as well as physically.

LOU: *Like post-traumatic stress disorder, or something.*

DON: Mm-hmm. I mean, if nothing else, it's gonna haunt your memories. You're gonna remember, if you're the Black Panther and you've been tied to a cactus . . .

LOU: *Or a burning cross.*

DON: . . . Yeah, or a burning cross. Wait a minute, that's a perfect example. Let's talk about that story a little bit.

above water was like when the Nautilus was going under."

LOU: *Well, that's one of the stories I wanted to ask about. Because Kevin Trublood, the reporter, is possibly my favorite character of yours. If for nothing else, just because of his speech in that issue, where he gets the spotlight and talks about . . .*

LOU: *"They Told Me a Myth I Wanted to Believe," from JUNGLE ACTION #20.*

LOU: *That's right. That's it. And his speech is, "I just hope I don't have to die, [just] because I believed in America."*

DON: Well, see, that story came about because it was America's Bicentennial. And I had been getting all kinds of hell about "Panther's Rage" from the people in charge. The biggest bitch that I heard constantly, for the two years of "Panther's Rage" was, "When are there going to be white people in the book?"

LOU: *How?* (Laughter.)

DON: Now, people can like or dislike the "Panther's Rage" books, but there's one thing about them. Recently, the VILLAGE VOICE wrote a piece on black characters in the comics. They mentioned the Black Panther, and said that he was the "selfless-to-a-fault, ideal" character that was being done in comics, that he would just give up anything for anybody, and that he was an American. Well, if anybody read those JUNGLE ACTION books, they'd know he wanted to go back to his homeland. If there's any historical significance to those books, it is probably that it was the first time, to my knowledge, that there was a series in which all the cast of the book were black. But it only made sense to me, because we're talking about a secret hidden-away city in Africa that nobody knows about! Where are these white people supposed to be coming from? *(Laughter.)*

And what Marvel had done previously is damage their own mythology on this character. Suddenly, people could wander into Wakanda and wander back out, but nobody knew where it was again. It was originally supposed to be hidden where nobody could find it. Well, jeez, if anybody could stumble across it that easy — but I gotta tell you, Lou: *(whispering)* I know where it is!

LOU: *Good!*

DON: *(whispering)* T'Challa swore me to secrecy! And I ain't telling nobody! *(Laughter.)*

LOU: (Laughter.) *The Panther will love you for that, I'm sure. But when you were talking about wanting to make the heroes more interesting than the villains, I still have to tell you that a lot of the villains you created, in the Black Panther, Killraven, and Sabre strips, were very good. For instance, Erik Killmonger . . .*

DON: Yeah. He's dead! I killed him! And I made sure he was dead! I didn't want anybody else writing him. When I came back with "Panther's Prey," you know, I had the bones sticking out *(Laughter)* and said, "Now, let's see what they can do with him!" *(Laughter.)* He's dead and he's stayin' dead!

But man, there was a lot of flak raised about that, because they were mad that Kantu, the little kid, was the one who knocked Killmonger over the side of the cliff! They didn't get it! They just did not get that book! They didn't get the fact that *the Panther won the fight — that mattered!* And so did the little boy! But, never mind, that's another story entirely. *(Laughter.)* Oh, man, was there heat over that!

LOU: *Yeah, they wanted the Panther to be the one who killed him.*

DON: Until the Ku Klux Klan stuff started, and that scene rapidly got forgotten. Then there was other heat to take.

LOU: *What was some of the heat you took because of the Klan story, for crying out loud?*

DON: Ohhh, they didn't want it. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *They didn't want it at all?* (Laughter.) *Yeah, I noticed that even in the story, you had to call it the C-L-A-N, rather than the K-L-A-N.*

DON: Inside the story, they didn't change it. I think they wanted it to be the Sons of the Serpent, or something like that. I said, "No, I don't want to do that."

Now, I was already thinking about doing a story about South Africa. In fact, in interviews of the time, I even talked about it. But, two things: it was America's Bicentennial at the time, and, second, I thought that I didn't now enough about apartheid at the time. I needed to do some more research. It was an unfortunate place in time for me to be ending that one series, and going into the next series of Panther stories, because I was going through a divorce. And I think the day I left the house because of the divorce, I got a call and learned that my father had had a heart attack. This is not a sob story; it's just that all these things really were happening at that point in time, one right after the other. So I didn't have as much time to stay with everybody on the book as I probably would have liked to.

But in doing that, storyline, the heat

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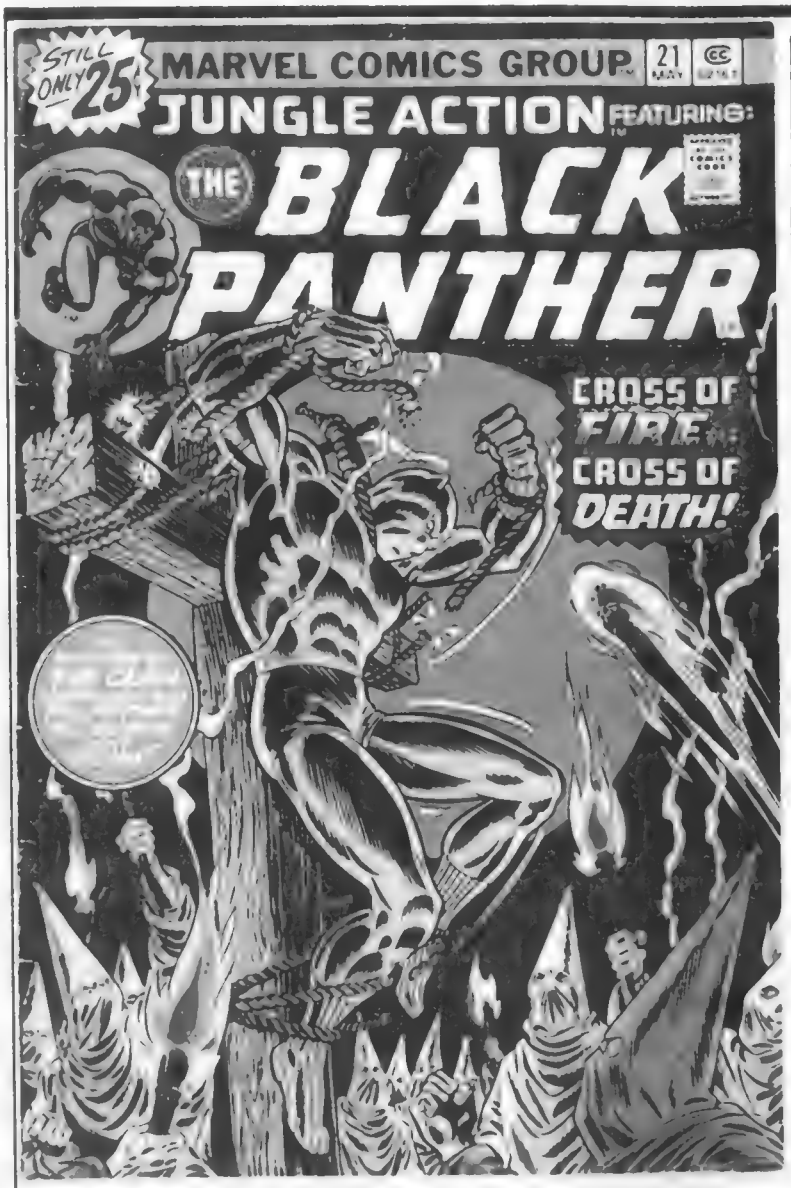
Dwayne Turner pencils from "Panther's Prey."

"Where the Panther's burning on the cross on the



probably just increased. We did the book where the Panther's burning on the cross, which you mentioned earlier. Obviously, I didn't make that up. There's too many minority people who were killed in such terrible, violent, wasteful, degrading ways. It never should have happened.

LOU: *And they're still being killed today, not only by the majority, but sometimes by their own kind, or by members of another minority, unfortunately.*

DON: Right. So when I was doing that book, on the cover you see that printed, the Panther's breaking fee of the ropes that hold him to the cross. That's not the original cover. **Rich Buckler** had really done a dynamic cover that had the Panther on the cross and burning. Certainly, on the cover I would never have shown how he gets out of it. I wouldn't have spent all that time building this thing up just to show you on the cover how he escapes.

But I think that's the only time the Comics Code Authority ever actually stepped in on one of my books. They said it was sacrilegious, and it is, you know? *(Laughter.)* I mean, people doing this, and using religion to force this kind of hate, and this kind of violence, and pain and death, yeah, I think it *is* sacrilegious! They said it was bondage. I said, yeah, it is! I don't disagree. But we're making a statement about this. The only thing that's not real about this is that the Black Panther survives! He survives and gets out of it! He's the hero, and, hopefully, most of the people reading that book want him to get out of it. He's the Black Panther, after all.

LOU: *Yeah. But I notice that your first caption, on page one, is, "He is not a symbolic Christ." Which I thought was a good statement, by the way.*

DON: Ahh, so many people in the comics were into that "symbolic Christ" stuff, it was just driving me nuts. *(Laughter.)* And that was supposed to be deep. And I didn't want them to forget, this is a human being! Don't turn him into Christ, don't turn him into anything else. He's a human being. And this is what happened to individual human beings, and this is what we've got to stop! Oh, man, you can see my juices still get riled up about *that* stuff. *(Sigh.)*

LOU: *So, on top of that, you're not going to tell us who was the real murderer of Monica Lynne's sister in your original story, are you?*

DON: No. Even if you put something under my fingertips, it's not gonna happen. *(Laughter.)* Not until I write the story.

LOU: *Well, one of these days, get around to writing the story, okay?*

DON: Well, that's more up to Marvel than it is to me.

LOU: *But when we're talking about the heroic ideal, the thing that gets me into the books you wrote in that period is the drive and force of these guys, their resistance against the elements, against their opposition, to restore some sort of dignity to their part of humanity. That's what really turned me on to Killraven. And that's what made me really feel good when, many years after the original series was cancelled, you got to wrap up that part of the story with Craig in the MARVEL GRAPHIC NOVEL with Killraven.*

DON: That was just wonderful, working with Craig on that book, being able to come back with him. And we were supposed to do a final one together, which was going to be the actual, final "War of the Worlds" story. I scripted about fifty, sixty pages of it, Craig was ready to draw it. And Marvel couldn't come to terms with Craig about what the package was going to be. It was all over what the *packaging* was going to be. And they wouldn't give Craig an assurance that they would put it out when he finished it, because it was going to take a long time; it was going to be a long book. He wanted to make sure that it was going to come out in a kind of prestige format, and they

cover you see printed, that's not the original cover."

wouldn't give him any kind of guarantee about that. That's the only reason it didn't happen.

LOU: *Hmmmmm. Maybe if they're reading this right now, by gosh, we wanna see it. Put it out, guys.* (Laughter.)

DON: The person who put the scotch to it isn't there anymore, so it's quite possible.

LOU: *Okay, since we're doing this interview kind of like a patchwork quilt, which is fine by me, let me ask you how you left Marvel. Did you quit, or get fired?*

DON: I quit. But I was taken off the books. I quit the staff job. And I knew it was a tremendous risk to do that, because I could kind of cover those books if you're in the office you can kind of babysit them and safeguard them like that. But I knew I was very vulnerable and at risk in terms of being a writer on the books.

Because you really had about three choices in those days if you wanted to write comics. I think, essentially, they wanted two things: First, mechanics, which meant that you knew certain things they wanted you to put into a comic-book story, and do them exactly as you would put a part into an assembly line. Second, they wanted a whore, which meant that you would do anything they wanted, whatever they asked you to do, and you didn't care if they put your name to that.

And if you didn't want to be a whore or a mechanic, your other option was to be a magician. What that meant was the old spinning-the-pie-plates kind of thing. You'd just distract the editor with pretty pictures, you know? *(Laughter.)* Then you could get over here, and you could write this or you could write that.

From that time period, I know that people are always putting **Steve Gerber, Steve Englehart,** and myself together. Actually, I don't think we have any similarities as writers, with the exception of one thing. We each had very individual approaches to doing comics, and very much imbued our own personalities into those stories. So that's probably something that was radically different from a lot of the stories that were done heretofore.

LOU: *So you quit Marvel, and about that time — I'm not sure that you were in any position to know — but JUNGLE ACTION got whunked right out from under you and given to Jack Kirby, as BLACK PANTHER. Was this because Kirby was coming back and wanted to do the book, or what?*

DON: No, it was just because I was being thick-headed and wanted to do the Ku Klux Klan story. *(Laughter.)* And I'm sure the sales were low on the book, even though I was going to bring in super-characters like Wind Eagle and everything. It wasn't going to be just about the Ku Klux Klan. What I really wanted to write about was the different organizations that were so divisive in American society, and so violently sure that they were right, and so ready to violate other people's rights. From all I can see, that book is as valid today as it was then.

LOU: *You now what I'd like to see you do right now? I'd like to see you do a Panther story where you bring him to America.*

DON: I'm going to do that. Hold on a second. *(Don takes care of a delivery man at the door.)*

LOU: *Okay, let's get back to the genesis of SABRE, which was also the genesis of Eclipse Comics. We've talked about it some, starting with Salicrup and Kraft at Mad Genius, but I want to know some of the mechanics of how you and Dean and Paul Gulacy got together and did that one.*

DON: Well, I knew that the comic-book industry as far as it stood was pretty closed. And if I was going to do this thing, I wanted to do a book that I could own the copyrights on — that, if there was money to be made on the book, we'd get a cut of the money. But we didn't have the kind of money to start out own company. At least I didn't. In those days you didn't get royalties on the books. You got a page rate, and it was considerably lower than what talent's paid these days. I certainly wasn't financially in any situation to do anything like that. In fact, I was probably living on about three or four thousand dollars a year at the time, in New York city.

LOU: *Oooch!*

DON: If you have to do that, I'm gonna tell you, it puts you through a lot of different things. *(Laughter.)* But, by the same token, I got to do books I wanted to do. And when I did SABRE, I didn't do it for much money. I did it much more for the royalties and things like that. And when I first talked to Dean about it — I had met Dean through the letters pages of the comic books; we met at the conventions and we got to be friends — I knew Dean loved comics, but I had no idea he wanted to create his own comic-book company.

And Dean was over at the apartment I was living in one night. We'd been watching some films and such. I already had a poster of Sabre that Paul had drawn, and had been talking about it. And Dean saw it. And I think we might have talked about

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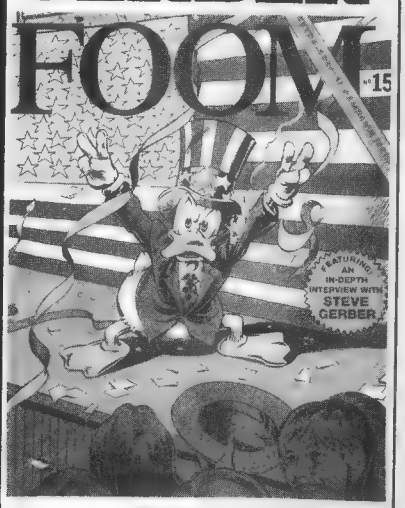

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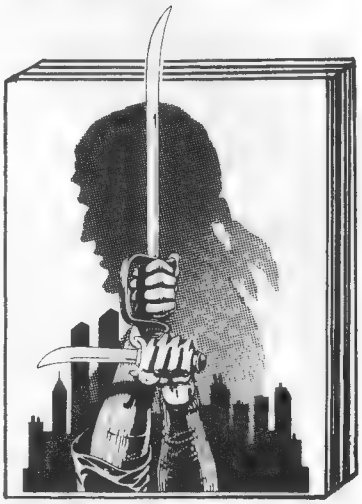

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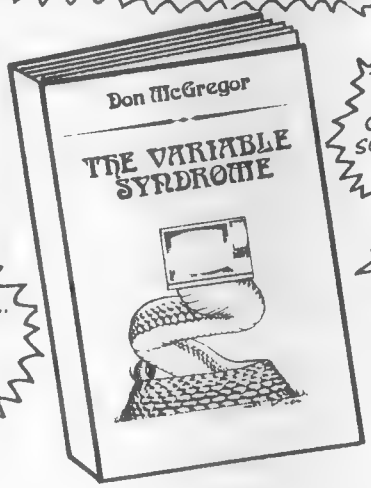

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"When the work-for-hire contracts were handed out, if you didn't sign them you didn't work."

it at the time. I don't remember what was said, but I certainly didn't talk about Dean publishing it, because I didn't know that Dean had any aspirations about being a publisher.

Then I got a call from Dean several days later, and he asked if he could publish it. I said, "What are you talking about? Whatta ya mean? You don't own a comic-book company!" *(Laughter.)* He said, "I wanna create my own comic-book company, and I want to do SABRE." And I said, "Well, you know, I want to have final say about anything that goes on with the book." He said, "Fine, you got it." "I wanna have my copyrights to the work." "Fine, you got it." *(Laughter.)* There were a number of other things that I ticked off to Dean that I wanted, and he said, "Great."

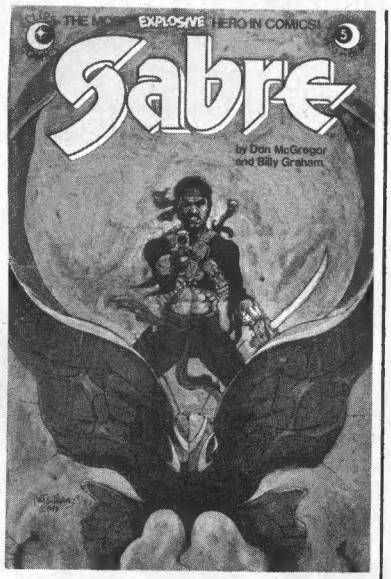
So I said, "Come on over — we should sit down and talk!" *(Laughter.)* So that's really the genesis of that.

Now, the downside of doing interviews, and why I have reluctance in doing them, is that even when people are very, very nice to you, is something like this happens: one of the New York television shows came up some years back, very nice people, and did a five-minute piece, and got all the influences on my stuff, including Hopalong Cassidy and I SPY, and managed to work it all into this piece. But there were things taken out of context. You'd hear my voice saying at one point, "I want the rights to my work." But they put it in as like a *carte blanche* thing. If I said, "I would never do a thing that I didn't own the copyrights to," and at the time I was doing NATHANIEL DUSK for DC, it makes me sound like — *(Laughter.)* "I heard Don's voice say it!" But what I was talking about was specifically saying to Dean that I wanted those rights on SABRE, and later for DETECTIVES, INC., and RAGAMUFFINS, and ALEXANDER RISK. They were books I wanted to own my copyrights to, and own those characters.

So Eclipse was in favor of that, and then we talked about the packaging. Dean was talking about putting it out in the traditional comic-book size, and I said, "No. I don't believe that we can come out with this book after my absence of two years on the stands. No matter what we do, it'll look just like another comic book. I think we really need to have a package that's going to look different."

LOU: *Draw some attention.*

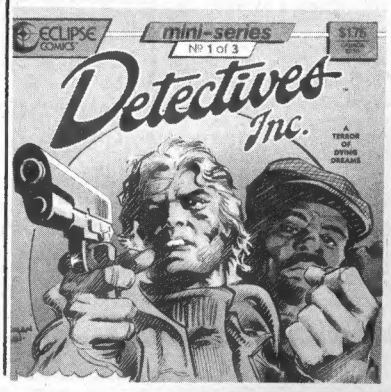
DON: And Dean was in agreement.



LOU: *And it worked like that, definitely.*

DON: Definitely it was worth doing, but it was a very tight time. Because it took a long time for those books to come out, and it didn't make lots of money immediately, you know. It took a very long, drawn-out period. *(Laughter.)*

And when the work-for-hire contracts were being handed out throughout the industry, if you didn't sign them, you didn't work in comics. That was virtually the edict: If you didn't sign them, you didn't get to work. I think when I refused to sign that contract at Marvel, my wife was eight months pregnant with our son Rob, so it was a tough decision to make. But I knew they would never leave the stories alone either, and that situation is gone through quite a bit in the back of my book, THE VARIABLE SYNDROME. If you really want to know what was happening behind the scenes at Marvel in 1978, this is probably fifty to sixty pages worth on the edicts that were going down then, which DAK published.



What amazes me now, though, Lou, and I may have talked about this before, I don't know: I walked into the San Diego Convention last year, and they have all the big displays now. And I thought I at least understood . . . there's a lot of things you can get very confused on. It's as if society is out there just trying to confuse you on issues you thought you understood. And you thought you knew what was going on. *(Laughter.)* But I thought I still knew who the good guys were. And I walk down and see this big plastic "THE GOOD GUYS!"

And I don't understand. Because could it be some of the people who are calling themselves "The Good Guys" were going around with hammers and swords back then *(Laughter)*, trying to destroy cutting-edge comics, trying to cut out creators' rights. And now they're trying to claim that they were *champions* of that stuff! *(Laughter.)* They've reversed their positions! Now that taking credit for things they don't do, is something some people do, but normally, though, they wait till other people are dead so no one can contradict them. *(Laughter.)* WOW!!

And then, the most amazing thing is, I think some of these people really believe this shit. Ah, *man!!* Unbelievable!

LOU: *Yeah, I know. But if they weren't there, they can be bamboozled by whoever's putting out the propaganda at the time.*

DON: Mm-hmm.

LOU: *Because, let's face it, any company is not out there necessarily to uphold the principles of truth, right, and justice. They're out there to make money. And that's the way it is. The bamboozling is to be taken into account any time you're dealing with that kind of official flak, I'm sure.*

DON: I think they're trying to rewrite history, personally. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *That's true, that's true. But unfortunately, they're the ones who are writing it. Maybe we can do a little revisionism ourselves.*

DON: It's not revisionism. It's remembering who did what and affected the lives of people who loved comics and also what books you saw, or more often, *didn't* get to see!

(NEXT: The final session!)

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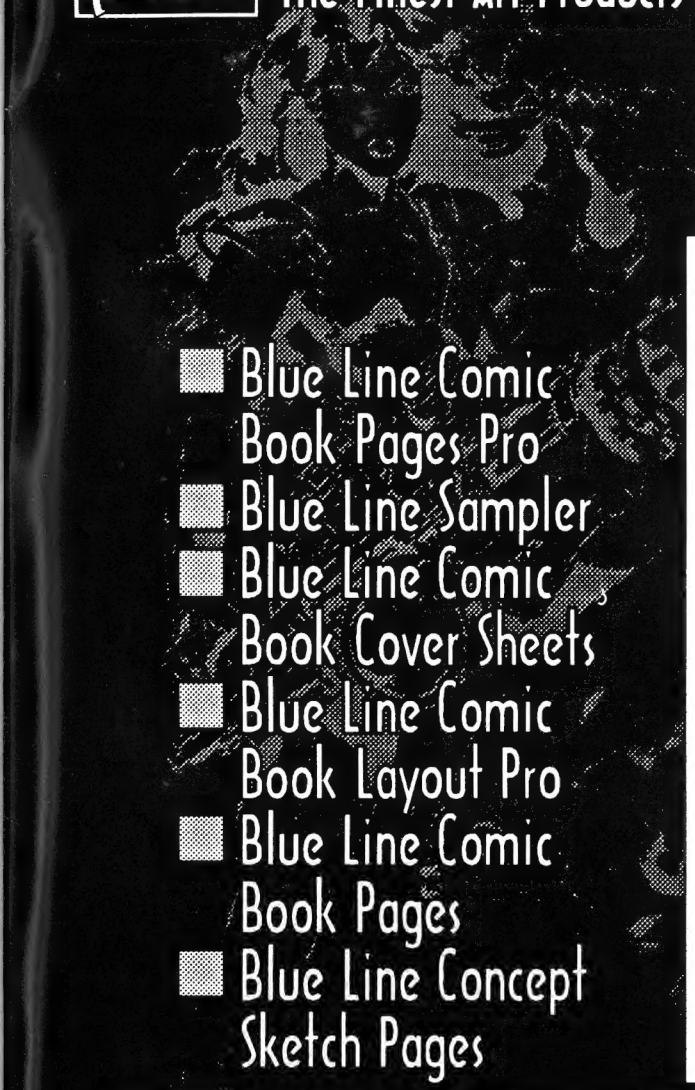

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